

**A FAMILY OF FAMILIES:
RECOVERING THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
PURITAN VISION FOR FAMILY, CHURCH, AND SOCIETY**

**A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

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MAY 2007

To Ann,

Who lived with such passionate, infectious joy
that few could be with her long without laughing,
and who gave me more happiness in nine years of marriage
than most men receive in a lifetime.

Ann, perhaps my greatest heavenly delight
will be hearing the sound of your laughter again.

“And those who lead the many to righteousness,
will shine like the stars forever and ever.”

Daniel 12:3

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ABSTRACT

The Puritans who settled New England saw the family first and foremost as a little church in itself. The worshipping congregation was a “*Familie of Families*,” a gathering of these little First Churches, connecting families and generations with each other in a mutually supportive, nurturing, and faith-enhancing manner that served to strengthen individual families, churches, and the common good of society. They hoped for the complete reformation and transformation of society by the spiritual renovation of home, church, and commonwealth (in that order) desiring to model in their New England what they hoped would be eventually emulated in Old England.

The New England Puritans had strong families, strong churches, control of the economic institutions, and were in charge of the political order. Yet, within a generation, their churches threatened to shrink until the ecclesiastical structure could no longer hold together. What went wrong? This thesis submits that one enduring error of the New England Puritans was to insist upon an inherently subjective and immeasurable standard for church membership that was not only anomalous to Puritan and reformed theology, but may have served to drive a tragically unnecessary stake into the very heart and foundation of the Puritan vision. Among other things, this aberration unwittingly fostered a subjective, even narcissistic, individualism among Christians that is, at root, antithetical to Puritan thinking in general and classical Reformed theology in particular. This served to tragically weaken the corporate, covenantal community at the heart of the Puritan vision, and I believe continued to seriously undermine and fragment evangelical congregations throughout America’s history to this day

This error notwithstanding, the Puritans have much by way of word and example that remains vitally and helpfully relevant today, especially to the fragmented families of our time. I believe a key to genuine and lasting church re-formation, vitality, and growth is to be found in recovering their vision of family, church, and society which was such an integral part of the grand spiritual heritage that founded this region and anchored this nation ... a recovery sorely needed in our families, churches, and society today.

INTRODUCTION

A familie is a little Church, and a little commonwealth,
at least a lively representation thereof, whereby triall may be made of such as are fit for
any place of authoritie, or of subjection in Church or commonwealth.
Or rather it is as a schoole wherein the first principles and grounds of
government and subjection are learned:
whereby men are fitted to greater matters in Church or commonwealth.

William Gouge (1575-1653), *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622)¹

The seventeenth century Puritan association of family, church and state was so strong that when they described the nature of the family they often did so in terms of the other two institutions, calling the family a little church or little commonwealth. They saw the family as *the* foundational unit of society; but perhaps more importantly, they saw the family first and foremost as a little church in itself. The family was the first church.

In his 1699 sermon entitled “A Family Well-Ordered,” Cotton Mather wrote that families are “...the nurseries of our societies. When families are under an ill discipline, all other societies will be ill-disciplined as a result, [they] will [all] feel the error of that first concoction.”² For Mather and the Puritans, the family was the primary foundation,

¹ John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Introduction.

² Cotton Mather, *A Family Well Ordered*, ed. D. Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2001), 1.

the basic fundamental, the characteristic building block not only of a healthy society, but of a healthy church.

I chose this topic for two main reasons, one personal and one professional. Personally, the subject holds interest for me because I am a father of three delightful children, thus pastor of a “little church” of four. Professionally, the subject holds interest for me because I am a pastor of a “not-so-little church” of four hundred, a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation located in New England. I’m increasingly fascinated and even enthralled by the rich spiritual heritage of those who settled this region in the seventeenth century, and am thoroughly convinced they have much in the way of word and example that remains vitally and valuably relevant in our day and age, especially in their high regard of the family.

J.I. Packer writes:

It is hardly too much to say that the Puritans created the Christian family in the English-speaking world. The Puritan ethic of marriage was to look not for a partner whom you do love passionately at this moment, but rather for one whom you can love steadily as your best friend for life, and then to proceed with God’s help to do just that. The Puritan ethic of nurture was to train up children in the way they should go, to care for their bodies and souls together, and to educate them for sober, godly, socially useful adult living. The Puritan ethic of home life was based on maintaining order, courtesy, and family worship. Goodwill, patience, consistency, and an encouraging attitude were seen as the essential domestic virtues. In an age of routine discomforts, rudimentary medicine without painkillers, frequent bereavements (most families lost at least as many children as they reared), an average life expectancy of just under thirty years, and economic hardship for almost all, family life was a school for character in every sense, and the fortitude with which Puritans ... laboured to honour God in their families despite all, merits supreme praise. At home the Puritans showed themselves mature, accepting hardships and disappointments realistically as from God and refusing to be daunted or soured by any of them. Also, it was at home in the first instance that the Puritan layman practiced evangelism and ministry. ‘His family he endeavoured to make a Church,’ wrote Geree, ‘... labouring that those that were born in it, might be born again to God.’

In an era when marriage, even among Christians, is becoming brittle and unstable, and serial marriage through a sequence of divorces is modeled under

limelight, so to speak, by top stars in the entertainment world, and casual sexual relations between adults raise no eyebrows, and teenage fornication is shrugged off as a universal and inevitable fact of life, and most children in homes grow up in pagan ignorance of God and his law, there is much to be learned by tracking Puritan thought on marriage and the family.³

To add a note to Packer's assessment from an admittedly subjective point of view, my personal observation is that Cotton Mather's "error of that first concoction" is too widespread in the churches I've served, past and present. The percentage of intact, stable and loving families in our churches just seems alarmingly small. I, too, am convinced "there is much to be learned by tracking Puritan thought on marriage and the family." I believe the key to genuine and lasting church re-formation, vitality and growth can be found in recovering this Puritan vision of the church as "a Familie of Families."

I should add that for seven years I've been a widower and solo parent, geographically isolated from the love and support of my extended biological family; at the time of my dear wife's passing in 1999, our children were ages seven, five and two. I've grown increasingly and acutely aware of my family's very practical need to be part of a greater family of faith on the local level. This "family of families" I've been privileged to serve at the Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian of Warwick, Rhode Island, has been and continues to be a source of tremendous nurture, support and blessing for my children and me.

³ J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: the Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 25-26, 260. See also footnote 22, where Packer cites the source for the Gere excerpt.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PURITAN IDEAL

Who Are the Puritans?

It has been said a Puritan is easy to recognize but hard to define. For the purposes of this thesis, the term “Puritan” refers to a zealous sixteenth and/or seventeenth century English-speaking Protestant Christian who actively sought to give the Bible foremost authority in his/her life. The Puritan was seeking “purity” in the church.

...The term ‘Puritan’ is used to cover all those who longed for further reformation in England according to the Word of God. Whilst the term is strictly applicable only to the ecclesiastical party who urged this concern in Elizabeth’s day and renewed it in the days of James I, it may be extended, in a wider sense, to the semi-Separatists such as John Robinson, who would never allow himself to deny that the Church of England was a true Church. Its main subdivision was into two parties, the Independents and the Presbyterians. Whilst each party had a different method of church government, they were both united in accepting the same doctrine of the all-sufficiency of the Word of God in doctrinal and liturgical matters. Despite small differences in detail, they are substantially the same, and their spiritual father is John Calvin.⁴

⁴ Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 11.

The Puritans differed in degree, not in kind, from other English Protestants. “The hotter sort of Protestants are called Puritans,” explains an English pamphleteer.⁵ The principal difference was that the Bible was the only authority a Puritan would acknowledge in matters of faith and practice, whereas “cooler” Protestants would also accept the authority of the church tradition in what were considered nonessentials of faith and practice. “Puritanism was a movement in which the Bible was central to everything. There is a sense in which the foremost issue of the Puritan movement was the question of authority. The Puritans resolved the question of authority by making the Bible the final authority for belief and practice. John Owen ... said that ‘Protestants suppose the Scripture to be given forth by God to be ... a perfect complete rule of faith.’ ‘Who, then, were these early Puritans?’ asks Derek Wilson; ‘Basically it was their attitude towards the authority of the Bible which marked them out as different from other English Protestants.’ ”⁷

Puritans were men and women trying to be biblical Christians in their place in life, beginning in the home. The Christian household was viewed by them as the primary foundation and the basic building block of a healthy church and a healthy society. Although they disagreed on finer points, Puritans were generally unified in their shared convictions that 1) the Bible is the authority for godly living, 2) the practice of biblical principles by truly Christian people has the power to transform home and household, 3) transformed households have the power to transform, or re-form, the church, and finally, 4) transformed churches have the power to transform commonwealth and state. The

⁵ Daniel Doriani, “The Godly Household in Puritan Theology, 1560-1640” (ThD dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1986), 6.

⁷ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 13.

Puritans hoped for nothing less than the complete reformation/transformation of society by the spiritual renovation of home, church and commonwealth, in that order.

Why Did the Puritans Come to New England?

In July 2003, my children and I traveled to Plymouth, Massachusetts to meet my parents, who had traveled from Pennsylvania to visit Cape Cod. As we toured the replica of the Mayflower moored in Plymouth's harbor, I told my parents what an impression the ship had made on me when I first visited during my doctoral residency that previous May. Standing in the cargo holds that served as the cramped living quarters of the original Pilgrims, I was impressed and humbled by the sheer stamina of those who endured that perilous, arduous trek — especially those (and there were many!) who came with young children. As we take our children to these places in our air-conditioned, stereo-and-DVD-equipped minivans down smoothly paved highways dotted with McDonald's, Papa Gino's and Dunkin' Donut stops, it's easy to forget the arduous hardships of a seventeenth century ocean journey, not to mention how bleak, barren and downright wild seventeenth century New England must have appeared to those new arrivals. As historian Samuel Morison put it, "many hearts grew faint and sick when they first beheld that wild-looking land, so different from the green and cultivated England they had left behind." William Bradford, in an oft-quoted segment from his historic account *Of Plymouth Plantation*, wrote:

Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before in their preparation (as may be remembered by that which went before), they had now no friends to welcome them, no inns to entertain or refresh their weather-beaten bodies, no houses or much less towns to repair to, to seek for succor. It is recorded

in Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle and his shipwrecked company that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them (as after will appear) were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise. And for the season it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast.

Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men — and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not. Neither could they, as it were, go up to the top of Pisgah to view from this wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have but little solace or content in respect of any outward objects. For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weather beaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hew. If they looked behind them, there was a mighty ocean which they had passed, and was now as a main bar or gulph to separate them from all the civil parts of the world.⁸

While the Mayflower was anchored in Provincetown Harbor, Bradford and a few others took a little boat to scout out the cape. When they returned days later, Bradford was told that “... his dearest consort [his wife], accidentally falling overboard, was drowned in the harbor.”⁹ Some historians suspect it was no accident. They have reason to believe that after gazing for weeks at the cold, wild, barren sand dunes of Cape Cod in December, Dorothy Bradford was overcome with despair and took her own life. William Bradford remarried three years later to a widow with two small boys; they went on to have three children of their own.

What drove these people to undertake such risks, dangers and sacrifice to come to these shores? The Puritans had left the old world and had come to New England for a variety of reasons, but one of the strongest reasons, by their own account, was the well-being of their children. More specifically, it was their urge to perpetuate in their children the eternal truths and principles of the Christian faith. This venture of faith came at

considerable personal cost to them. But they paid it, willingly, in order to have the opportunity, as they saw it, of enabling their children and their children's children to grow up in a community of faith that would nurture a lifelong love of God and foster in them a passion for the virtues of faith, integrity and honor.

Here are some short excerpts from sermons of that era: Samuel Willard (1640-1707; he was pastor of the Old South Church in Boston from 1678 until his death) told the New Englanders of 1682 that "... the main errand which brought your Fathers into this Wilderness, was not only that they might themselves enjoy, but that they might settle for their Children, and leave them in full possession of the free, pure, and uncorrupted liberties of the Covenant of Grace." Increase Mather (1639-1723; he was the youngest son of Richard Mather and the father of Cotton Mather) addressed young people in 1679, reminding them that "...it was for your sakes especially, that your Fathers ventured their lives upon the rude waves of the vast Ocean." About the same time John Wilson (1588-1667; teaching pastor of the First Church of Boston) reminded the older generation "... you came hither for your Children, Sons and Daughters, and for your Grandchildren to be under the Ordinances of God."

In listing some of the many reasons why his family and friends came to New England, Massachusetts Bay governor John Winthrop explained that their children were too much exposed to evil and corrupting influences in English schools and colleges. He wrote, "The Fountains of Learning and Religion (besides the unsupportable charge of their education) are so corrupted as most children, even the best wits and [those] of fairest hopes are perverted, corrupted, and utterly overthrown by the multitude of evil examples

⁸ Samuel Morison, *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647*, ed. William Bradford (New York: Knopf, 2001), 62.

and the licentious government of those [halls of learning], where men strain at gnats and swallow camels, use all severity for maintenance of caps and other accomplishments, but suffer all ruffian-like fashions and disorder in manners to pass uncontrolled.”

Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) recalled in his autobiography that at the time he left England he “...considered how sad a thing it would be for me to leave my wife and child, (if I should die) in that rude place of the North [i.e. Yorkshire] where was nothing but barbarous wickedness generally and how sweet it would be to leave them among God’s people, though poor.” For Shepard, the New England wilderness, with all its dangers, hardships and native Indian inhabitants, was the place of God’s people, while “civilized” England was the place of barbarity, rudeness and wickedness.¹⁰

The Pilgrims who settled Plymouth had originally left England for Leyden, Holland; however, as Edmund Morgan puts it, they were dismayed to find Holland no better than the England they left. Bradford wrote of their time in Leyden: “...of all sorrows most heavy to be borne, was that many of their children, by these occasions and the great licentiousness of youth in that country, and the manifold temptations of the place, were drawn away by evil examples into extravagant and dangerous courses, getting the reins off their necks, and departing from their parents ... tending to dissoluteness, and the danger of their souls, to the great grief of their parents and dishonour of God. So that they saw their posterity would be in danger to degenerate and be corrupted.”¹¹

William Gouge wrote, “If men of wisdom and ability build an house for their habitation, they will be sure it shall be where sweet rivers and waters are, and good

⁹ Ibid., xxiv.

¹⁰ All sermon excerpts are recorded in, and have been taken from, Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 168-170.

¹¹ Ibid., 25.

pasture ground, and where all needful provision may be had. God's word preached is a spring of water of life; the place where it is preached a pleasant, profitable pasture; all needful provision for the soul may there be had. Let this therefore be most of all inquired after: and no habitation settled but where this may be had."¹²

These tough, rugged, back-boned Puritans who crossed a treacherous ocean to carve a civilization out of a daunting wilderness came for a variety of reasons, to be sure, but one of the strongest reasons, by their own account, was they sought this type of "habitation" for their families, and for their children in particular. This venture came at considerable personal cost to them, but they paid it willingly, in order to have the opportunity, as they saw it, to "build an house for their habitation" where their children and their children's children might have the opportunity to grow up in a Christian community of faith that would nurture and foster in them a lifelong love of God and His word. They wanted their children and their children's children to be and live well.

The "First Church" of Puritanism

"What a wonderful thing to put on record, that the name 'church' is applied to a single family, and yet it is fitting that all the families of believers should be organized in such a way as to be so many little churches."¹³ These words of John Calvin anticipate the characteristic Puritan ideal of the family as a little church, united in true worship of and service to God, and constituting the foundational unit of the greater church and commonwealth.

¹² Doriani, 75.

¹³ Lisa S. Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 71.

The family, the church and the state were three arenas of an integrated Puritan vision of bringing about the kingdom of God in the world, with the family holding the primary importance of the three. Historian Edmund Morgan wrote, “If the family failed to teach its members properly, neither the state nor the church could be expected to accomplish much.”¹⁴ William Perkins (1558-1602) said, “Marriage was made ... by God himself, to be the fountain of all other sorts and kinds of life in the commonwealth and in the church.”¹⁵ Both family and church are societies ordained by God in which the worship of God is of paramount importance. Furthermore, both are governed by the Bible and by leaders who lead by the instruction and enforcement of biblical precepts, all for the good of the members. Both work toward the same goal: to glorify God by producing godly people in a godly society. William Gouge stresses this point as he implores his readers to conduct their households accordingly:

Oh if the head and several members of a family would be persuaded to be conscionable in performing their duties, what a sweet society and happy harmony would there be in houses? What excellent seminaries would families be to church and commonwealth? Necessary it is that good order first be set in families for as they were before other polities, so they are somewhat the more necessary: and good members of a family are like to make good members of church and commonwealth.¹⁶

While they were radical ideologues dedicated to societal reform, the Puritans saw themselves as architects and builders, not anarchic wreckers. They were not revolutionaries bent on tearing down in order to rebuild; at heart, they were reformers intent on creating a Holy Commonwealth from within. They sought reform without revolt and believed the reform could and should begin at home. As the godly family will provide the seed for a godly church, which in turn will provide seed for a godly

¹⁴ Morgan, 139.

¹⁵ Ryken, 74.

commonwealth, the family was given first priority. Deodat Lawson, minister at Salem Village from 1684 to 1688, wrote, “The foundation of a whole people’s or kingdom’s reformation or defection, religion or rebellion is laid in Families. Families are the constituent parts of nations and kingdoms; hence as families are well or ill disciplined, so will the whole be well disposed or ill inclined.”¹⁷ Efforts for genuine and lasting reform should, therefore, begin right at home.

In 1621 Robert Cleaver sharply rebuked heads of households who reversed the order by giving church or state social priority:

For such householders as pretend to be great Protestants and sound professors of the gospel may long enough talk of discipline and still complain of the want of church government but all in vain ... unless they begin this most necessary discipline of reforming their own houses. ... For though there be never so good laws in cities, never so pure order in churches, yet if masters of families do not practice at home catechizing and disciplining in their houses and joining their helping hands to magistrates and ministers they ... complain that their children and servants are disordered and corrupted abroad when in truth, they were disordered and corrupted at home.¹⁸

Echoing Cleaver’s admonitions, the English Puritan Thomas Taylor exhorted heads of households to make every effort to manage the home as if it were a little church, treating it as the birthplace and cradle of true reformation:

Let every master of a family see to what is called, namely, to make his house a little church, to instruct everyone of his family in the fear of God, to contain everyone of them under his holy discipline, to pray with them and for them ... The way to frame a good servant is to make him God’s servant. How many men go back to their estates and marvel things thrive so ill, and see not this to be the cause; that suppose themselves be not wicked, yet they suffer their sons or servants so to be, through whose hands the work goeth, and all is in a want and consumption? Many complain of evil times and general corruption: and many talk of want of discipline in the church, or good laws in a state, [but] will not mend things till thou

¹⁶ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, Introduction, p. 2; cited in Doriani, 53.

¹⁷ Deodat Lawson, “The Duty and Property of a Religious Householder,” (Boston: 1693) in Richard Gildrie *The Profane, The Civil and the Godly* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 85.

¹⁸ Doriani, 54.

mend thy family. If all families, where reformation must begin, were brought in to this discipline, our eyes should see a happy change.¹⁹

Thus, for the Puritan, the identity of the family was bound up with that of church and commonwealth by an organic and functional unity. An orderly, faithful, functional God-glorifying commonwealth would begin with an orderly, faithful, functional and God-glorifying family in the home.

It should be noted New England Puritans did not view family worship as a rival to or substitute for congregational worship, but rather as its necessary complement. The church took very seriously her charge to encourage, promote and at times enforce the performance of family religious duties at home. Domestic instruction and home worship were considered indispensable to the success of the weekly services in the church, for faith matters were far too important to be left to weekly lessons. If the family failed to function as the “first church” in teaching its members properly, neither the state nor the church could be expected to accomplish much.²⁰

For those single individuals who came to New England with no family, attempts were made to find families to whom they might “belong” and under whose roof they

¹⁹ Cahill, 71-72.

²⁰ E.S. Morgan (139-140) writes of one New England congregation that took very seriously her charge to promote and enforce the performance of family worship at home: “In 1680, Increase Mather's church in Boston announced: ‘We promise (by the help of Christ) that we will endeavour to walk before God in our houses, with a perfect heart; and that we will uphold the worship of God therein continually, according as he in his word doth require, both in respect of prayer, and reading the Scriptures, that so the word of Christ may dwell richly in us; And that we will do what in us lyeth, to bring up our children for Christ, that they may become such, as they that have the Lords name put upon them by a solemn dedication to God in Christ, ought to be; and that therefore we will (so far as there shall be need of it) Catechize them, and exhort and charge them to fear and serve the Lord, and endeavour to set an holy example before them, and be much in prayer for their Conversion and Salvation.’ In 1677, the church at Dorchester promised ‘to Reform our families, engaging ourselves to a conscientious care to set up and maintain the worship of God in them and to walk in our houses with perfect hearts in a faithful discharge of all domestic duties: educating, instructing and charging our children and our households, to keep the ways of the Lord; restraining them as much as in us lyeth, from all evil and especially the sins of the times and watching over them in the Lord.’ The First Church of Boston voted unanimously in December 1669, ‘that the Elders

might live. This was thought necessary not only for the purposes of religious duty, nurture and support, but to root out potential social disorders before they had the chance to manifest themselves. It is important to note that the state was viewed not as a collection of individuals, but as a collection of families or households. “The Puritans recognized this fact in characterizing families as ‘the root whence church and Commonwealth cometh,’ ‘the seminaries of Church and Commonwealth,’ ‘the foundation of all societies,’ and ‘the Nurseries of all Societies.’ ...”²¹ Such as families are,’ James Fitch warned, ‘such at last the Church and Commonwealth must be.’”²¹ The attitude of “rugged individualism,” which many have supposed to characterize the spirit of the early American settlers, was decidedly *not* an attitude encouraged by the Puritans in seventeenth century New England. The ideal state was not to be a collection of independent individuals; it was to be a supportive network of families.

[T]hese statements expressed the assumption upon which Puritan leaders acted, namely that **the state is made up of families rather than individuals**. The governors of the Massachusetts Bay Company, for example, tried from the very outset to bring every member of their colony who was not himself the head of a family under the control of a family government. ... In 1638 Massachusetts ordered every town to “dispose of all single persons and inmates within their town to service, or otherwise. In February 1636/7 Connecticut provided “that no young man that is neither married nor hath any servants, and be no public officer, shall keep house by himself, without consent of the town where he lives first had, under pain of 20s. per week. (emphasis added)”²²

The typical household included children, servants, apprentices, the single adults referred to above, and, in many cases, extended family. All were considered “members” of the First Church of Puritanism, the family.

should go from house to house to visit the families and see how they are instructed in the grounds of religion.”

²¹ Ibid., 144

²² Ibid., 145.

When the Puritans said ‘family’, they had in view not only parents and children, but also servants (all homes save the poorest had at least one live-in servant), elderly relatives being looked after (there were no retirement homes or geriatric hospitals in those days), and sometimes other residents too — in short, an extended, as distinct from nuclear, family. It was with reference to such human units that John Gere wrote, in his 1646 tract “The Character of an Old English Puritaine, or Nonconformist:” ‘His family he endeavoured to make a Church, both in regard of persons and exercises, admitting none into it but such as feared God; and labouring that those that were born in it might be born again to God.’²³

The Puritans viewed the male head of the household as the one biblically responsible for directing and instructing the entire household in the ways of the Lord; they understood the headship of husband and father as a biblical mandate. “From the Puritans’ own point of view ... the main reason for thinking out the ethics and spirituality of marriage in male-leadership terms was their belief that male leadership is in fact biblically prescribed, an exegetical conclusion that nearly everyone held from the second to the twentieth century.”²⁴ The male head of household had final responsibility and accountability for the well-being of the entire household.

As head he was God’s chief officer, providing for and watching over the spiritual, social and economic lives of all under his care. He did not need to “do” everything; ideally, he was an overseer and delegator in many areas. There were several areas of responsibility in a typical household, and the wife was usually delegated authority in many of these spheres. The wife, for example, was, next to the husband/father, the authority over children and household servants. According to Samuel Willard, “She is invested with an authority over them by God; and her husband is to allow it to her ... For though the husband be the head of the wife, she is an head of the family.” Judge Samuel

²³ Packer, 270.

²⁴ Ibid., 266.

Sewall (1652-1730) recorded in his diary that he had delegated the family finances to his wife for the reason that she had “a better faculty than I at managing affairs.”²⁵

Though the husband was the accountable head of the family, the husband and wife shared responsibility in the day-to-day oversight of the household. Women and men were seen as spiritual equals, in that both are saved by God’s grace alone, both are called to a life of faith and accountability to God, and both have the mutual obligation to give children, apprentices, and servants religious example and instruction, educating them in patterns of life consistent with godliness. Generally, the customary Puritan term for defining the hierarchical relationship was to refer to the wife as an assistant; never was she to be referred to, or treated as, a servant. “Samuel Willard wrote, ‘Of all the orders which are unequals, those of husband and wife come nearest to an equality, and in several respects, they stand on even ground. These two make a pair, which infers so far a parity.’²⁶ ‘In general the government of the family ... belongeth to the husband and wife and both,’ wrote William Gouge. William Perkins regarded the husband as the ‘chief ruler’ and the wife as ‘the associate, not only in office and authority, but also in advice and counsel unto him.’ ”²⁷

In his “Directions for Married Persons,” William Whately (1583-1639), giving emphasis to the partnership of husband and wife under the man’s leadership, said of the married couple: “Their first care must be, that the living God be truly worshipped in their house, and that the knowledge and fear of him be planted in the hearts of their children and servants. To this end they must read the Scriptures, and call upon the name of God

²⁵ Ryken, 78.

²⁶ Ibid., 53.

²⁷ Ibid., 78.

amongst them, and catechize them in the principles of true religion, that none under their roof may be ignorant of the fundamental truths of godliness.”²⁸

The Puritans and Marriage

For the Puritans, the marriage relationship was the heart of a household. Historian Levin Shuecking describes the Puritan marriage ideal as “a perfect sharing,” calling it “Puritanism’s greatest and most admirable cultural achievement.”²⁹ The Puritans’ high view of marriage in general and women in particular contradicted a Roman Catholic tradition that had persisted for nearly a millennium. The dominant attitude of the Roman Catholic church throughout the Middle Ages was that the physical act of love itself was somehow corrupt and/or tainted, even if the object of affection was one’s spouse. “Augustine, Tertullian, Jerome, and others concluded that even in marriage, even when man and wife act in order to beget children, concupiscence so attends the procreative act that there is always at least venial sin.”³⁰ Virtually all the church Fathers have statements extolling virginity and celibacy as superior to marriage.³¹ Generally

²⁸ Doriani, 75.

²⁹ Levin Shuecking, *The Puritan Family* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 37.

³⁰ Daniel Doriani, “The Puritans, Sex and Pleasure,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (Spring 1991), 127.

³¹ From Diana Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downers Grove, IL: IV Press, 1999), 276-277:

In the ascetical literature of the second through fifth centuries, it is clear that sexual renunciation was considered the primary path to divine favor and spiritual gifts. Other virtues paled in comparison; even vows of poverty were considered optional. Keeping the body pure was considered necessary for a spiritual marriage with Christ. Tertullian even went so far as to maintain that sexual expression, including marital intercourse, did not belong in the Christian life.

Writers such as Augustine (354-430) and Jerome (c. 347-419/420) questioned whether sex had been a part of God’s original creation. Origen (c. 185-253/255) and the anonymous author of the Gnostic Gospel According to the Egyptians, as well as others, stated that Adam and Eve were originally created free from sexual feelings. It was their sin that introduced sex, lust and death into the world.

speaking, in this area the Puritans affirmed what the Roman Catholics denied and denied what the Roman Catholics had traditionally affirmed. “The Puritan doctrine of sex was a watershed in the cultural history of the West. The Puritans devalued celibacy, glorified companionate marriage, affirmed married sex as both necessary and pure, established the ideal of wedded romantic love, and exalted the role of the wife.”³²

When God presented Eve to Adam, he “solemnized the First Marriage that ever was,” and in so doing gave His sanction to marriage itself. Therefore, the Puritans said, with an eye on the Catholics, those who “speak reproachfully of it do both impeach God’s Wisdom and Truth.” “God was of another mind” than those who believe in “the excellency of virginity,” for he had provided the first man with a wife. According to John Cotton, “Women are creatures without which there is no comfortable living for man: it is true of them what is wont to be said of governments, that bad ones are better than none: they are a sort of Blasphemers then who despise and decry them, and call them a necessary evil, for they are a necessary good; such as it was not good that man should be without.”³³

The Puritans’ high view of marriage is well summarized by Thomas Becon (1512-1567): “Matrimony is a high, holy and blessed order of life, ordained not of man, but of God ... wherein one man and one woman are coupled and knit together in one flesh and body in the fear and love of God, by the free, loving, hearty, and good consent of them both, to the intent that they two may dwell together as one flesh and body, of one will and

Augustine, Tertullian, Jerome and others concluded that even in marriage, even when husband and wife have intercourse in order to conceive children, sexual expression always leads at least to venial sin. Many theologians thus placed restrictions on marital sex. Thomas Aquinas stated that intercourse must be engaged in only out of a sense of duty to conceive children or to render one’s debt to a spouse. Motivation by duty was meritorious; motivation by pleasure or desire for one’s partner was sinful.

At the fourth Council of Carthage in A.D. 398, it was declared that newlyweds should abstain from intercourse on the wedding night out of respect for the benediction. They could, however, pay a fee to the church to avoid this proscription. The church subsequently forbade sexual relations during menstruation, pregnancy and lactation; during seasons of fasting and on certain festival days; for forty days before Easter, Pentecost and Christmas; and for three to seven days before Communion. Abstinence was also recommended on Thursday in memory of Christ’s arrest, on Friday in memory of his death, on Saturday in honor of the Virgin Mary, on Sunday in honor of the resurrection and on Monday in commemoration of the departed. In short, good Christians could have sex on Tuesday and Wednesday during limited weeks of the month and seasons of the year.

³² Ryken, 53.

³³ Morgan, 29.

mind, in all honesty, virtue and godliness, and spend their lives in equal partaking of all such things as God shall send them with thanksgiving.”³⁴

In fact, love between husband and wife was understood by the Puritans as a duty, albeit an enjoyable and pleasurable one, imposed by God. Love was a solemn obligation that was part and parcel of the marriage covenant. Clergyman and former president of Harvard University Benjamin Wadsworth (1670-1737) explained,

This duty of love is mutual, it should be performed by each, to each of them. They should endeavor to have their affections really, cordially and closely knit, to each other. If therefore the Husband is bitter against his wife, beating or striking of her (as some vile wretches do) or in any unkind carriage, ill language, hard words, morose, peevish, surly behavior; nay if he is not kind, loving, tender in his words and carriage to her; he then shames his profession of Christianity ... The same is true of the Wife too. If she strikes her Husband (as some shameless, impudent wretches will), if she's unkind in her carriage, gives ill language, is sullen, pouty, so cross that she'll scarce eat or speak sometimes; nay if she neglects to manifest real love and kindness, in her words or carriage either; she's then a shame to her profession of Christianity ... The indisputable Authority, the plain Command of the Great God, required Husbands and Wives, to have manifest very great affection, love and kindness to one another. They should ... study and strive to render each other's life, easy, quiet and comfortable; to please, gratify and oblige one another, as far as lawfully they can.³⁵

This Puritan ideal of “companionate” marriage of spiritual equals with mutual obligations somewhat softened and tempered the prerogatives of male dominance in the home. While still affirming male authority and headship, Puritan views of marriage had the effect of easing hierarchy and promoting marital equality. In marked contrast to the perceived misogyny of medieval Roman Catholicism, Puritans exalted women, especially in their role as wives and mothers. “ ‘Of all degrees wherein there is any difference betwixt person and person,’ wrote Gouge, ‘there is the least disparity betwixt man and wife.’ He explained: ‘Though the man be as the head, yet is the woman as the heart,

³⁴ Ryken, 49-50.

which is the most excellent part of the body next the head, far more excellent than any other member under the head, and almost equal to the head in many respects, and as necessary as the head.’”³⁶

However, the head of household would never delegate completely the spiritual leadership in the home, for he alone had the God-given and biblically mandated responsibility to lead. Gouge wrote the husband was “to his wife, as well as to the whole house ... a king, a priest, and a prophet.” Smith used the same three-fold description of the head of household and explained that “a master hath all the offices of Christ for he must rule and teach and pray; rule like a king, and teach like a prophet and pray like a priest.” Therefore the husband had the duty to catechize, pray and exhort those under his care, to “restrain them all he can from lewd courses, ill company, the corruption of the time.”³⁷

E.S. Morgan writes, “Every morning immediately upon rising and every evening before retiring a good Puritan father led his household in prayer, in scriptural reading, and in singing of psalms.”³⁸ It should be noted the head of household held this office (a) only in his own home and (b) in a derivative, analogical way. The “little church” of the home did not *supplant* the local church congregation, nor did the little commonwealth of the household have authority over the greater commonwealth of the community. For example, his “priesthood” did not give him the right to administer the sacraments publicly or privately, nor did his “kingship” threaten monarch or magistrate. However,

³⁵ Judith Graham, *Puritan Family Life: The Diary of Samuel Sewall* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 23.

³⁶ Ryken, 53.

³⁷ Doriani, “The Godly ...,” 73 (inclusive of the first three quotations of the paragraph).

³⁸ Morgan, 136.

he was “king, priest and prophet” under his own roof; he was the senior pastor of the First Church of Home and Household. As J.I. Packer summarizes,

The Puritans crusaded for a high view of the family, proclaiming it both the basic unit of society and a little church in itself, with the husband as its pastor and his wife as his assistant-subordinate indeed in the chain of command, but a key figure in the ongoing pastoral process nonetheless. It was the husband’s responsibility to channel the family into religion; to take them to church on the Lord’s Day, and oversee the sanctifying of that entire day in the home; to catechise the children, and teach them the faith; to examine the whole family after each sermon, to see how much had been retained and understood, and to fill any gaps in understanding that might remain; to lead the family in worship daily, ideally twice a day; and to set an example of sober godliness at all times and in all matters. To this end he must be willing to take time out to learn the faith that he is charged to teach.³⁹

Packer goes on to quote Puritan church leader and scholar Richard Baxter (1615-1691), “I do therefore desire, that all masters of families would first study well this work [the Westminster standards] themselves, and then teach it their children and servants, according to their several capacities. And, if they once understand these grounds of religion, they will be able to read other books more understandingly, and hear sermons more profitably, and confer more judiciously, and hold fast the doctrine of Christ more firmly, than ever you are like to do by any other course. First, let them read and learn the Shorter Catechism, and then the Larger, and lastly, read the Confession of Faith.”⁴⁰

The head of household’s chief domestic responsibility was to ensure his entire household practiced and received the benefits of the private and public worship of God. Fathers were to raise the family early in the morning “that they may have time to make ready their hearts.”⁴¹ They should go to the public assembly joyfully and eagerly themselves on the Lord’s Day and ensure that all the family comes in due time. The whole family should attend together, unlike some that “come by pieces, either when half

³⁹ Packer, 270.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 271.

is done, or else they are ready to depart before half ended.”⁴² The head of household should take measures to ensure that all members of the household profited from their attendance. At worship he should supervise and direct his servants, ensuring that they “sit in a convenient place where they may hear and learn, and not in obscure places, where they spend their time in prating, or scoffing.”⁴³ Later, heads of households should “question them what profit they had, by coming to God’s ordinances.”⁴⁴ Robert Cleaver berated men who allowed their households to neglect public worship, saying that to neglect to bring servants to public worship is to “use them more like beasts than men, even that they might be serviceable unto them, and then care not whether they serve God or the devil.”⁴⁵

As cited earlier, William Gouge directed that a good husband will best provide for his wife and family by choosing a habitation where they “may have the benefit of preaching the word since many houses of God lack it through the corruption of our times. ... If men of wisdom and ability build an house for their habitation, they will be sure it shall be where sweet rivers and waters are, and good pasture ground, and where all needful provision may be had. God’s Word preached is a spring of water of life; the place where it is preached a pleasant, profitable pasture; all needful provision for the soul may there be had. *Let this therefore be most of all inquired after: and no habitation settled but where this may be had.*”⁴⁶ (emphasis mine)

⁴¹ Doriani, “The Godly ...,” 77.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 75.

Again, many historians believe this was the primary motivation that drove the Puritans to leave the old world for New England: “Let this therefore be most of all inquired after: and no habitation settled but where this may be had.” The Puritans came for a variety of reasons, to be sure, but one of the strongest reasons, by their own account, was they sought this type of “habitation” for their families, and for their children in particular. This venture came at considerable personal cost to them, but they paid it, willingly, in order to have the opportunity, as they saw it, to “build an house for their habitation” where their children and their children’s children might have the opportunity to grow up in a Christian community of faith that would nurture and foster in them a lifelong love of God and His Word.

The Puritans and Their Children

Puritan parents have been portrayed by some historians as aloof, distant, harsh, repressive, lacking in affection for their children, even hating their children as agents of sin within the household in need of merciless beating. The following 1628 quote of John Robinson is frequently cited as an example of the perceived harshness of Puritans toward their offspring: “And surely there is in all children, though not alike, a stubbornness, and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride, which must ... be broken and beaten down ... This fruit of natural corruption and root of actual rebellion against God and man must be destroyed, and no manner of way nourished except we will plant a nursery of contempt of all good persons and things, and of obstinacy therein ... For the beating and keeping down of this stubbornness parents must provide ... that children’s wills and

willfulness be restrained and repressed. The second help is an inuring of them from the first, to such a meanness in all things, as may rather pluck them down, than lift them up.”⁴⁷

John Robinson’s oft-quoted excerpt does refer to a *stubbornness* that must be “broken” (as in “tamed”), an *attitude* that must be “beaten down” and corrected, and a *root of rebellion* that must not be allowed to flourish. However, his words should not be misunderstood as to be advocating the beating and keeping down of children themselves. Rather, he is giving a practical exhortation to Puritan parents on how to better *love* their children, which historical evidence indicates they sought earnestly to do. As a general rule Puritan parents fiercely loved their children; they made huge sacrifices for them, and they certainly saw children as a rich blessing from God. They believed God desired parents to love their children, just as God loves His children in Christ.

Even a casual reading of the most noted Puritan journals and autobiographies - those of Thomas Shepard, Samuel Sewall, Cotton Mather -- reveals a deep-seated parental affection for children as the most common, normal and expected attitude. The relationship between parents and children was often compared with that between God and the Children of God. “That God is often angry with [his children],” Samuel Willard wrote in 1684, “afflicts them, and withdraws the light of his countenance from them, and puts them to grief, is not because he loves them not, but because it is that which their present condition requires; they are but Children, and childish, and foolish, and if they were not sometimes chastened, they would grow wanton, and careless of duty.”⁴⁸

While believing children were a gift and a blessing from God, they simultaneously believed children were “on loan” in that they really belonged to God. God had lovingly entrusted His children to parents for a time as a stewardship. Cotton Mather (1663-1728), who would predecease only two of his fifteen children, said, “It was

⁴⁷ David Stannard, “Death and the Puritan Child,” in Albert Vaughan and Francis Bremer, eds., *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society and Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 235.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

from God that we received those dear pledges, our children, and it is to God that we return them. We cannot quarrel with our God, if about these loans he says unto us, give them up; you have had them long enough!”⁴⁹ In another context, John Robinson affirmed that children “are a blessing great and dangerous.”⁵⁰ The blessing is great, in that children can be a tremendous joy and delight; however, the blessing is dangerous, as children live in a hazardous world abounding with constant physical and spiritual danger, both of which can bring great grief to godly parents.⁵¹ Again, for the Puritan, parental love ought to resemble God’s love for His children, a love that is passionate, redemptive, fiercely protective, yet firm. “‘The children born in our families are born unto God,’ declared Deodat Lawson; God ‘put them out to us.’ According to Cotton Mather, parents ‘must give an account of the souls that belong unto their families.’ Thomas Watson

⁴⁹ Graham, 105.

⁵⁰ Doriani, “The Godly ...,” 391.

⁵¹ The twenty-first century reader must remember the ever-present reality of disease and death faced by the Puritans, and the resultant anxiety this must have caused families. The following excerpt is from Diana Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 258-259:

“In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, households in the colonies often were much larger than the nuclear family, including servants and apprentices as well as numerous children. The membership of the household was quite fluid. Death frequently removed members; both children and adults. Only slightly over half of all children born lived to become adults. More women died in childbirth than for all other reasons combined; one birth in thirty resulted in the death of the mother. The woman who survived her childbearing years bore eight children on the average, though it was probably relatively rare for as many as six of the eight to survive to adulthood. A marriage often ended early in the death of one spouse; only half of adults reached the age of fifty. Only one out of three marriages endured more than ten years. Unlike today, the death of a spouse was not something to be expected as one approached “old age” but a part of what we now regard as the prime of life. Those who survived often married two or more times. Birth order was therefore much more important to one’s life experiences in colonial America than it is now. First-born children were much more likely to spend some or all of their childhood with biological parents. Younger children were more likely to experience the death of one or both parents and to be members of stepfamilies or raised by older siblings. The frequent remarriage of widows and widowers meant that households often included stepchildren. A man who married at age twenty-five might lose his wife when he was thirty-five after she had borne him four or five children. He might then marry a young widow with one or two children, and together they would have several more children. If he then died, she might remarry and have still more children. One such ‘chain of marriage and remarriage’ in Virginia from about 1655 to 1693, made up of six marriages among seven people, yielded at least twenty-five children. A visit to this household in 1680 would have found the presence of children (ranging from infancy to the early twenties) from four of the marriages, some of whom did not have any parents in common.”

believed Christian parents ‘will endeavor that their children may be more God’s children than theirs.’ Benjamin Wadsworth wrote regarding children that God ‘calls them His ... They belong to Him by covenant; they have been solemnly consecrated to His service; and what, will you not bring them up for Him, to whom you have thus solemnly consecrated them?’⁵² As Levin Shuecking asserts, the Puritans saw children as such a blessing that the practice of birth control and/or family planning to limit the number of children conceived would have been unthinkable.

It is God’s will that a man should have children. Only the wicked look upon many children as a misfortune ... whereas the faithful regard it as the highest form of good fortune. In the Puritan family, therefore, large numbers of children were the rule. “I hope she will be fruitful,” wrote Oliver Cromwell to his son concerning his daughter-in-law, and it is noteworthy how in this department, religious faith utterly nullifies the rationalist attitude towards life which prevails in most other matters. To employ means to prevent conception or to limit the family to a single child in order to enhance its worldly fortune is regarded as a direct counsel of Satan.⁵³

William Gouge wrote, “The main good which parents ought especially to seek after in the behalf of their children, is noted out in these words: ‘Bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.’” Robert Cleaver echoed this exhortation, affirming the conviction that children were a rich blessing from God entrusted for a time to the parents’ care, and asserted that the first duty of parents was to “...instruct and bring up their children even from the cradle in the fear and nurture of the Lord. Parents are to be admonished that the cause why the Lord hath blessed them with children is: first, that they should be careful to see that their children be so virtuously brought up that they become citizens of the church of God.”⁵⁴

⁵² Ryken, 79.

⁵³ Shuecking, 67.

⁵⁴ Doriani, “The Godly...,” 402 (all quotations in the paragraph).

Appealing to the natural affection of parents for children, as well as the acknowledged parental responsibility to express their love for their children by raising them in the fear and admonition of the Lord, Richard Mather exhorted his Dorchester congregation by imagining children on the Judgment Day addressing neglectful parents: “All this that we here suffer is through you: you should have taught us the things of God, and did not; you should have restrained us from sin and corrected us, and you did not; you were the means of our original corruption and guiltiness, and yet you never showed any competent care that we might be delivered from it. Woe unto us that we had such carnal and careless parents, and woe unto you that had no more compassion and pity to prevent the everlasting misery of your own children.”⁵⁵

J.I. Packer cites Gaius Davies’ summary of the Puritan ideals of child-rearing:

The preachers stressed that love is the fountain of all parents’ duties. But children should not be spoilt; parents must not, like apes, kill their young ones with hugging. The example of parents is the greatest stimulus to holiness, especially that of the mother, whose influence during the child’s early years is greater. Education should begin as early as possible, and though it should be thorough, godliness is more important than learning, and schoolmasters must be chosen with this in mind. The aptness or gifts of children should be noted, that they might be trained for a suitable calling. The claims of the Christian ministry should be remembered, and where the ability exists, a son should be exhorted to enter it. The child’s first instruction in religion should be adapted to its age, so that the child receives it with delight. Thus the seeds of godliness would be planted early.⁵⁶

Analysis

Judge Samuel Sewall (1652-1730), a prominent Puritan father, jurist and merchant, left a remarkable daily journal spanning some fifty-five years of his life; this

⁵⁵ Ryken, 48.

⁵⁶ Packer, 271.

diary was referred to earlier. Judith S. Graham's Puritan Family Life: The Diary of Samuel Sewall is based on a close reading of this daily journal and other family papers of Judge Sewall. In the concluding chapter, she summarizes just about all of the Puritan ideals of home/church leadership, marriage and child rearing discussed thus far as displayed in Sewall's life. Although this is a fairly extensive excerpt, I believe it is best read in its entirety.

To glimpse the nature of Sewall's mental world is, I think, to begin to understand the character of Puritan family life. Surely Sewall, with his pre-scientific cast of mind, was different from any modern parent. The forces he understood to be affecting his children were more powerful and unyielding than any that a father or mother today would imagine. Sewall's religion demanded that he lead his children away from their innate sinfulness, and bring them into a covenant with God. There was nothing figurative or symbolic about these demands; to fail to meet them was to condemn his children to eternal damnation, to put at risk not only his family, but his entire community, and the great Puritan experiment in New England. Nor was the physical world in which he raised his sons and daughters a safe and reassuring place. Diseases and infections proceeded inexorably and uncompromisingly, with virtually nothing but the child's constitution available to fend off not only the illness but also the doctors' harmful cures. God's judgment was always being revealed, in earthquakes, lightning storms, frigid winters, and in the regular occurrence of devastating fires and shipwrecks. There was little anyone could do to prepare for or mitigate the effects of these calamities. Hostile Indians raided the frontier towns, the French threat hovered over New England, and the treasured colonial freedoms were subject to the vagaries of the English rulers.

Sewall dearly loved his children and treated all of them with extraordinary kindness and understanding. He made allowances for their shortcomings, and valued each of them as a worthy and interesting individual. He guided his children wisely, if sometimes overzealously, sparing no material or spiritual assets in his efforts to secure their well-being and prosperity. In return, the Sewall children loved and respected their father (and their mother), sought his company and counsel, and paid him the tribute of following his Puritan ways in their own adult lives.⁵⁷

If Judith Graham's assessment is correct, Samuel Sewall was not only a successful, prominent merchant and judge, by Puritan standards he was also the successful,

⁵⁷ Graham, 219, 224.

prominent pastor of the First Church of Home and Household. “It may well be said that the whole Puritan movement has its roots in family, and that we cannot even begin to understand it if we leave the family out of account. Religion is, for the Puritan, family religion. Divine worship is, not incidentally but primarily, family worship.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Shuecking, 56.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT WENT WRONG?

As we've seen, the seventeenth century New England Puritan understanding of family permeated every area of their individual, church and community life. The family was central to Puritan theology and practice; repeatedly in sermons, personal letters, and other written records the Puritans state that their primary motivation in settling the new world was the present and future well-being of their families. Not that the family was an end in itself; indeed, the Puritans saw the well-ordered family as a vital (if not the *most* vital) and necessary contribution to the earthly "end" of society's common good. Their commitment to family extended beyond their own immediate children to include relatives of just about every degree. Marriage broadened their relationships, with in-laws (and, in the case of death and remarriage, even former in-laws) considered as important as blood relations. Relatives were given preferred prices and subsidized business, just because they were family. Thus the extended family was strong, secure and well-established to meet spiritual, social and economic needs. The Puritans believed that "as long as the

family was well-ordered, as long as men respected the logic of relationships, corruption would be restrained within bounds and society would be established.”⁵⁹

Although they disagreed on finer points, the Puritans were generally unified in the shared conviction that (1) the Bible is the authority for godly living in the home, (2) the practice of biblical principles by truly Christian people has the power to transform home and household, (3) transformed households have the power to transform, or re-form, the church, and (4) transformed churches have the power to transform commonwealth and state. The Puritans who settled New England hoped for nothing less than the reformation/transformation of society by the spiritual renovation of home, church and commonwealth, in that order, desiring to model in their New England what they hoped would be eventually emulated in Old England. “On the voyage over, in 1630, John Winthrop said to them: ‘For wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty uppon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us.’ They had been attempting in England to lead a revolution; after the King’s dismissal of Parliament in 1629 it looked as though there was no longer any hope of revolution there, and so they migrated to New England, to build the revolutionary city, where they could exhibit to Englishmen an England that would be as all England should be.”⁶⁰

The family, for the Puritan, was the first church. As the godly family would provide the seed for a godly church, which in turn would provide seed for a godly commonwealth, the family was given a top priority. However, even with all their love, attention and devotion to the family, the Puritan vision and experiment in New England seemed to be showing signs of failure within one generation. Many adult children of the

⁵⁹ Morgan, 151.

⁶⁰ Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 158.

first generation New Englanders apparently could not meet the high standards set for church membership, and they began having children of their own who were not eligible for baptism. The Half-Way Covenant of 1662 allowed baptism to this third generation. The Half-Way Covenant is viewed by some historians as the Puritan's tacit admission that they were losing their children by failing to pass the generational baton of visionary faithfulness on to them.

The Half-Way Covenant: Sign of a Failure to Pass the Generational Baton?

Consistent with their covenantal theology, the seventeenth century New England Puritans believed church members could claim the promises of God's covenant on behalf of their children through baptism.⁶¹ However, when many adult children of the first generation could not meet the high (and, as will be discussed later, highly *subjective* and even self-contradictory) standards set for church membership, necessary questions were raised. When a nonmember son of a church member produced a child of his own, was that child to be separated from the blessings of the covenant? The new father had been in some sense a member of the church. Was he still? If so, was he a member in a different

⁶¹ As one originally ordained to ministry by the American Baptist Churches, I know first hand that the debate between those who advocate believer's baptism and those who advocate covenant baptism of believers' children (paedobaptism) is not one easily explained and/or understood by all within Protestant Christendom. I grappled with this issue for years before coming to my present convictions; I switched denominational affiliation to the Presbyterian Church (USA) largely due to this issue. It is not within the scope of this thesis to fully explain and/or defend covenant paedobaptism, other than to point out it was the standard Puritan practice. Briefly, the Puritan/reformed belief is that baptism has superseded circumcision as the sign of the covenant, the same covenant given to Abraham, according to which God promised to be a God not only to him but also to his descendants (Gen. 17:7). If those united to Christ by faith are heirs of the Abrahamic covenant and its attached promises, then they are heirs of the promise that their seed will be the object of God's redemptive work in Christ in salvation.

sense than before? What about the child? Was the child a member of the covenant community? Should the child be baptized? If the family, for the Puritan, was the first church, how could it be reconciled having members of the first church unable and unqualified to be members of the greater church? The questions were difficult, if not impossible, to answer coherently in the context of seventeenth century New England Puritan beliefs and practices, and every attempted answer only seemed to generate more questions. This set the stage for the development of the Half-Way Covenant.

In 1662 the churches of New England convoked a synod and announced that the children of the primitive church members were included in the covenant by the promise of God to Abraham. This solution was called at the time the half-way covenant, and the very phrase itself is an instructive demonstration of the New Englanders' awareness that their revolution was no longer revolutionary. These children, they decided, must be treated as members of the church, although they had not had the kind of experience that qualified their fathers. They must be subject to discipline and censures, because the body of the saints must be preserved. But just in case the authorities might be mistaken, they compromised by giving to these children only a "halfway" status, which made them members but did not admit them to the Lord's Supper.⁶²

The Half-Way Covenant of 1662 allowed baptism to this third generation despite the fact that the second generation was, by the first generation's standards, somewhat spiritually "deficient." The term itself attached to this covenant was one of derision given by those who thought the solution constituted a lowering of standards for the church; in essence, a compromise. Thus, the compromise of the Half-Way Covenant appeared to demonstrate a loss and/or deflation of Puritan vigor and zeal.

Puritan scholars have called the Halfway Covenant (1662) the locus classicus of the orthodoxy's decline. The first emigrants restricted civic as well as religious power to "visible saints" - that is, to those among them who had experienced conversion, testified persuasively to that effect, and continued to behave in a way which indicated, "within the reach of reasonable charity," that they were truly elect. When, therefore, many of the children of the saints did not qualify for visible sainthood, their failure seemed to erode the very basis of the [Puritan] errand. The

⁶² Miller., 159.

Halfway Covenant was an effort to prevent erosion. While retaining the premises of visible sainthood, it granted provisional church status to the still-unregenerate children on the grounds that, in their case, baptism alone conferred certain inalienable covenant rights. In retrospect, we can see how much the compromise deflated the founders' "holy pretence."⁶³

The Half-Way Covenant may have raised more questions than it answered, thus creating more complications than it solved. What went wrong? With all their apparent love and admirable attention to the family, why did so many godly parents seemingly fail in this most fundamental task of passing the baton of zealous faithfulness to the next generation? Did they really fail? Were so many children of faithful parents actually growing up "unregenerate"? If so, how was that determined?

From their earliest years, children were constantly and consistently presented with a distinctively Christian worldview. As we've seen, a distinctive mark of the Puritan family was a commitment to daily family worship. Fathers were required and expected to lead their households in the knowledge and fear of the Lord. The conscientious Puritan father began and ended each day with family prayer, reading of Scripture and singing of Psalms. The churches preached it, the Magistrates enforced it, and for the most part, the fathers did it.⁶⁴

Yet, even this thorough and consistent dedication to instructing the children in spiritual matters did not result in the numbers of adult believers capable of qualifying for

⁶³ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: The Wisconsin Press, 1978), 63.

⁶⁴ Morgan, 88: "In 1642 Massachusetts enacted a law requiring masters of families to teach their children and apprentices to read. As amplified six years later, the law required that no one should '...suffer so much barbarism in any of their families as not to endeavour to teach by themselves or others, their children and apprentices so much learning as may enable them perfectly to read the english tongue, and knowledge of the Capital lawes: upon penaltie of twentie shillings for each neglect therin. Also that all masters of families doe once a week (at the least) catechize their children and servants in the grounds and principles of Religion, and if any be unable to doe so much: that then at the least they procure such children or apprentices to learn some short orthodox catechism without book, that they may be able to answer unto the questions that shall be propounded to them out of such catechism by their parents or masters or any of the Select men when they shall call them to a tryall of what they have learned in this kinde.' The grounds of

church membership needed to maintain the viability of the Puritan vision. In spite of all their theological advantages, and in spite of all the preaching, teaching and admonition directed at them, the children did not seem to “get converted,” either before they came of age or after. As a result, the number of full members in the churches gradually shrank until the ecclesiastical structure could no longer hold together.

The Half-Way Covenant of 1662 enabled the unconverted children of church members to retain their incomplete membership after becoming adults, but it did not increase the number of full communicants. Before the end of the century the Puritan system was tottering. The founders of New England had staked the success of their experiment on the success of their churches. They confined political rights to church members, so that the existence of the state depended upon the maintenance of a continuous supply of converts for the churches. If the supply failed, not only the church but the state, too, would collapse, for a kingdom of God could not be maintained without the support of godly citizens. The Puritan system failed because the Puritans relied upon their children to provide the church with members and the state with citizens.⁶⁵

New England’s founders left Old England to build the City on a Hill in order to be a light to the world. Yet within a generation, the light seemed to be flickering and in danger of burning out. I’ve come across almost innumerable speculations, explanations, theories and opinions as to the causes of the Puritans’ presumed failure to pass the baton of zealous faith on to the next generation, which, in turn, contributed in large part to the perceived failure of the Puritan errand. In my research I found the perceived causes fall generally into three broad categories.

the law are clear: the Puritans insisted upon education in order to insure the religious welfare of their children.”

⁶⁵ Ibid., 185.

Three General Categories of Speculated Cause(s) of Failure

This analysis is necessarily incomplete and a bit simplistic due to my limitations of time, expertise and resources; however, for the purposes of this thesis, the three categories are: (1) Common difficulties historically associated with being in the faithful minority, (2) critiques of Puritan child-rearing practices, and (3) the high, and somewhat inconsistent, standards of church membership.

Common Historical Difficulties of the Faithful Minority

One needs to remember committed Puritans did not make up the entire New England population in the seventeenth century; in fact, they quickly became a distinct minority. While the Puritans certainly blazed the trail, many other Englishmen soon came after who did not necessarily share the Puritans' degree of theological intensity and experiential conviction. Within just a few years, massive immigration swamped the Puritan citizens of the "City upon the Hill." No matter how many children the Puritans had (and they bore many!), their numbers did not match the shiploads of new settlers who did not share their ways. The inundation of immigrants who did not share their convictions presented an ever-increasing challenge to Puritan parents. Sermons during the period repeatedly warned Christian parents of the dangers of allowing their children to associate with the ever-larger numbers of immigrants who did not share their religious resolve. Edmund Morgan summarizes:

In coming to the wilderness, then, the founders of New England hoped to protect their children from profanity. In the new world they expected to have the

company of godly men like themselves. They miscalculated. To be sure, they could not have supposed that all the inhabitants of their new Canaan would be saints; they must have expected many scoundrels to show up — and they were prepared to deal with scoundrels — but they did not imagine that the emigration would bring to the shores of Massachusetts Bay such a horde of average, lusty Elizabethan Englishmen. The settlement had scarcely got under way before John Humfrey was advising Winthrop to look for another place of refuge and “to remove our choice people thither and to leave the mixt multitude (that will ever bee as thornes and prickes unto us) behind us.” Five years later Nathaniel Ward wrote to John Winthrop, Jr., that “our thoughts and feares growe very sadd to see such multitudes of idle and profane young men, servants and others, with whome we must leave our children, for whose sake and safty we came over ... we knowe this might have bene easily prevented by due and tymely care of such as had the opportunity in their hand; and if it be not yet remedied, we and many others must not only say, with grief, we have made an ill change, even from the snare to the pitt, but must meditate some safer refuge, if God will afford it.”

No safer refuge was found. The number of unregenerate who crossed the ocean along with the saints was too great to banish from the land. It has been estimated that they amounted to four-fifths of the total population, and while this figure has rightly been challenged, it is quite possible that the godly were in a minority.... Here the godly at least controlled the government, as they definitely did not in old England. If they had not escaped from the company of the unregenerate, they had at least gained political power over them. ... The Puritans nevertheless had to admit that their refuge in America was harboring a lot of unwanted guests. Their children were still exposed to the influence of evil men. Though the civil government could give visible proof, in stocks, jails, and whipping posts, that sin did not pay in Massachusetts, yet children would inevitably gravitate toward the fascinating company of notorious sinners.⁶⁶

Historically, being in the faithful minority has not been a unique problem for the people of God. Since the time of Genesis it has quite often been the lot of the zealous faithful to be in the minority, having to live and work and raise their children among hard, difficult people who care little for their beliefs or customs. This does provide a formidable challenge to be consistently Christian in any time or culture, and I do not intend to minimize the considerable parenting difficulties this entailed for the faithful Puritans. However, I believe the twin advantages of the unique political leverage they exercised and the historic evidence of the strength, stability and tenacity of the Puritan

family warrants we must look elsewhere for additional cause(s) for the necessity of the Half-Way Covenant.

Critiques of Puritan Child-rearing Practices

Generally, those who unfavorably critiqued Puritan parental practices believed the parents' zeal may have caused a negative backlash from the children, resulting in their refusing to take the baton of faith the "harsh, aloof and demanding" parents were attempting to pass on.

The historical evidence indicates much of the Puritans' instruction for parents on child rearing seems to be generically Christian, and perhaps it could be said to be generically human; for example, parents should provide for their children physically, mentally and spiritually until their independence. Physically they owe food, shelter and protection; mentally and spiritually they owe education that will inculcate skills for adult life and training that will give them moral and spiritual guidance.

Beyond that, historians seem to widely disagree about Puritan attitudes toward their children. Some believe Puritan parents loved and worried and sacrificed for their children then, much as conscientious Western parents generally do now, while others thought most Puritan parents were unduly harsh, cool, distant, repressive and lacking in affection for their children.

Still others assert the Puritans were somewhat confused, displaying elements of both, thus conveying mixed messages to their offspring. While profoundly concerned about their children — loving them, cherishing them, praying over them and doing their utmost to inculcate moral and spiritual values in them — at the same time they feared

⁶⁶ Ibid., 170.

and, some would say, even *hated* their children as agents of sin within the household, at times berating and even beating them mercilessly. Thus, they believe the parents maintained a somewhat contradictory coldly loving aloofness; as a result, many children perceived receiving little affectionate love and much harsh punishment. In his essay, “Death and the Puritan Child”, David Stannard observes:

The Puritans of New England held as doctrine the belief that they were involved in a binding contract or “covenant” with God. This belief was complex and multifaceted, but one aspect of it viewed the entire community as having contracted a “social covenant” with God by which they promised strict obedience to his laws. Failure to obey on the part of any individual within the community could result in God’s wrath being vented on the entire community. The depraved and ungodly child was, it is true, naturally repellent in its sinfulness; but more than that, the activity that might easily grow out of that sinfulness posed a very real danger to the well-being of the community. In response, understandably enough, the Puritan parent strove mightily to effect conversion or at the least to maintain a strict behavior code, but at the same time - when these effects were combined with the way he felt for his child, the tenuous hold the child had on life, the natural repulsiveness of sin - he may well have been driven to find ways of creating emotional distance between his offspring and himself.⁶⁷

Levin Shuecking’s critique was that the Puritan parents’ chief goal was to keep their children in “unconditional subordination,” that the typical Puritan parents’ discipline and perceived limited love amounted to cruel and oppressive torture of their offspring, that the breaking of the will was the prime aim of early education and physical punishment was the standard method for attaining it.⁶⁸ Edmund Morgan, on the other hand, criticized the New England Puritans for a doting and even excessive *overindulgence* to their children. He contends Puritan parents put so much love and hope in their children that they “...committed the very sin that they so often admonished themselves to avoid: they had allowed their children to usurp a higher place than God in

⁶⁷ Stannard, 236.

⁶⁸ Shuecking, , 72, 95.

their affections.”⁶⁹ Morgan drew the conclusion that “they translated ‘Love thy neighbor’ into ‘Love thy family.’ They did not completely neglect the surrounding sinners, since they punished every breach of the law possible, striving to bring all under the external observance of God’s commands. But in the end, the church ‘was turned into an exclusive society for the saints and their children. Instead of an agency for bringing Christ to fallen man it became the means of perpetuating the gospel among a hereditary religious aristocracy.’”⁷⁰

One other fairly frequent historical criticism of Puritan child rearing worth special note is the alleged custom of “fostering out” their adolescent children. Some historians contend it was a common English practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth century to send children from home sometime between the ages of seven and fourteen for education, apprenticeship, or even to be a servant in the home of a friend or neighbor, and that the Puritans generally followed this custom. It is further suggested this practice served to weaken the emotional, psychological and spiritual ties that bound the children to their families. Thus, this custom, intended to benefit the children, is believed to have inadvertently served to further inure them against the faith of parents who would compel them to leave home in the tumultuous adolescent years, years they were more consciously in need of parental love, affection, direction and discipline than ever before.

However, the Puritans themselves seem to have said or written almost nothing about this allegedly universal practice. “In fact, [in the godly preachers’ writings] references to changing forms of instruction and discipline in later years give the impression that parents would be keeping their children at home into the teen years.

⁶⁹ Morgan, 185.

⁷⁰ Lisa S. Cahill, Family: A Christian Social Perspective (Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 2000), 79.

Second, on those few occasions when the godly preachers spoke of the custom they mention it briefly, in passing, and usually only to regulate it. For example, Cleaver said: ‘Moreover parents when they mean to put forth their children to any trade or occupation either to learning, they then ought carefully to inquire, whether such as they think to place them withall be religious and virtuous and endued with the fear of God.’⁷¹ Edmund Morgan observes the removal of a child from his or her home “seems a little strange, in view of the importance which the Puritans attached to family relations.”⁷² As Judith Graham asked, “Why would fathers and mothers so deeply committed to their children’s salvation, so inward, exclusive and controlling – so tribal – in their religious life have needlessly released these children to mere strangers, acquaintances, or even kin?”⁷³

Furthermore, in their writings regarding other child-rearing issues, the Puritans seem to have taken a very dim view on delegating the care and nurture of children outside the household. For example, Puritan preachers repeatedly criticized a similar, less widespread “delegated nurturing” practice often carried out by the well-to-do:

For convenience or putative physical reasons many wealthy families gave their children to wet nurses for the first year or two of life. Virtually everyone who spoke of child care called on mothers to nurse and care for their own children. The examples of godly women in the Bible and the laws of nature demanded it, said the preachers, who did not hesitate to make their full authority a third voice. They called it a mother’s chief duty; Henry Smith boldly scolded gentlewomen who claim to have no milk. “But whose breasts have this perpetual drought? Forsooth, it is like the gout; no beggars may have it, but citizens or gentlewomen. In the ninth chapter of Hosea, dry breasts are named for a curse ... sure if their breasts be dry, as they say, they should fast and pray together; that this curse might be removed from

⁷¹ Daniel Doriani, “The Godly Household in Puritan Theology, 1560-1640.” (ThD dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary 1986) 414-415. Note the parenthetical reference to the “godly preachers” writings. Puritans preferred to call themselves “the godly”; the term Puritan was originally a derisive term given by critics that first surfaced in the 1560’s.

⁷² Graham, 149.

⁷³ Ibid., 150.

them.” Gouge took time to examine eighteen (!) objections to nursing, using Scripture and nature to uphold the good of the child over the economic gain, quiet, beauty, pride or pleasure of mother or father. He also argued mothers are the best care takers of their children, and that their children thrive best with them. “Mothers are most tender over them, and cannot endure to let them lie crying out, without taking them up and stilling them; as nurses will let them cry and cry again, if they be about any business of their own. Children nursed by their mothers are for the most part more cleanly and neatly brought up, freer from diseases; not so many die; I am sure not so many through negligence cast away.”⁷⁴

The Puritan preachers were adamantly assertive in decrying what they perceived to be a particular social evil in this particular form of “farming out” of the nurture and care of young children. They repeatedly affirmed their conviction that it was God’s design for parents to be the full and primary caretakers of their children, thus disputing arguments of convenience for the delegation of this primary parental role. Why weren’t similar arguments raised for older children, if fostering out of adolescent children was indeed common among the faithful?

We see from their words on breast-feeding that the Puritans were fearless and adamant in decrying social evils. They were principled, resisting all arguments of convenience. They did not fear to command their people to follow definite rules in their most private decisions. The alleged English practice of sending virtually all children from home was without biblical warrant. Therefore it should have elicited either defense or criticism from the Puritans. Why then the silence on this occasion? It seems that children left home as preteens only when their education required it. When they left to become servants or apprentices, they were teenagers. Of course, extraordinary circumstances such as extreme poverty or the death of a parent may have forced deviation from the norm. But recent researchers are not finding cases of children leaving home between the ages of seven and twelve without compelling reasons. Conrad Russell recently said, “I have found no instances of it (preteen children leaving home) except widowers leaving their children with their sisters ... but these are special cases.” It may seem [to us] premature to send a 14 year old from the home to be an apprentice, but first, that is a very different thing from sending out a 7 or 10 year old. Second, we must remember that in 20th century America, 18 is the informal age of adulthood. The youth can vote, leave home, marry and so on. In post-Reformation England the child probably became an adult at 14. At that age he could leave home and marry.

⁷⁴ Doriani; 416-417.

So if children left home at 14 or so, as most recent historians say, the “problem” has virtually disappeared.⁷⁵

We’ve seen that the Puritans saw children as a blessing from God. They believed whole-heartedly God taught them to love their children, and children belonged first and foremost to God, Who entrusted them to parents for a time as a stewardship. They made every effort to be faithful and loving stewards in this arena. Although parents did employ the rod, they were taught repeatedly it was not to be used to terrify or break the child. John Eliot (1604-1690) wrote, “The gentle rod of the mother is a very gentle thing, it will break neither bone nor skin: yet, by the blessing of God with it, and upon the wise application of it, it would break the bond that bindeth up corruption in the heart.”⁷⁶ The rod was to be used with gentleness, self-control, moderation, even grief. It was always used as a last resort, as an act of love intended to show by living metaphor the painful consequences of sin.⁷⁷

As a general rule, historical evidence indicates Puritan parents loved their children; they made huge sacrifices for them, believing God desired them to love their children just as God loves His children in Christ, and there’s much evidence this love was genuinely and lavishly reciprocated by the children. “Even a casual reading of the most

⁷⁵ Ibid; 415-420.

⁷⁶ Ryken, 80.

⁷⁷ Doriani (389) writes, “It seems that two of the sons of the Bible’s King David, Solomon and Absalom, did the most to form the puritans’ attitude toward children. Solomon authored the oft-cited 127th psalm, which reads in part: *‘Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.’* Absalom’s rebellion against his adoring and perhaps doting father followed by Absalom’s death and his father’s grief, cover the central themes of 1 Samuel 13 to 19. Solomon’s authoritative word of the blessing and Absalom’s gripping tale of the curse became the twin pillars of puritans’ perspective on parenting. Because the Bible declared children a heritage, a reward and a source of happiness, the preachers did the same. Because Scripture showed and experience confirmed that these blessings were conditional, the preachers looked upon children as a conditional blessing, a treasure that could spoil. Still, God declared the man who shared his house with wife and child blessed (Ps. 128:3-4), and that remained the puritans’ first and final judgment, however they may have qualified it.”

noted Puritan journals and autobiographies — those of Thomas Shepard, Samuel Sewall, Cotton Mather — reveals a deep-seated affection [between parents and children] as the most common, normal and expected attitude.”⁷⁸ In summary, I believe if indeed the adult children of the first generation New Englanders failed to embrace the zealous faith of their parents, as seems to be indicated by the necessity for the Half-Way Covenant, then the historic evidence warrants we must again look elsewhere for cause(s).

High and Somewhat Contradictory Standards of Church Membership

The standards that were eventually set for those who desired to be full members of the New England churches may have proved too difficult, intimidating or even too bewildering for their grown children to adequately assimilate. I propose it is precisely here that the Icarus of the Puritan errand may have flown too close to the sun.

When the Separatist Puritans sailed on the Mayflower to establish the first permanent settlement in Plymouth, the newly established church founded there was defined as a “company of the faithful.” The Separatists objected to the Anglican practice of establishing congregations by parish, that is, by primarily geographical criteria. They were adamant the criteria for membership in the church should not be determined by the circumstances of one’s residence, but by the condition of one’s heart; that is, the church should be “a companie and fellowship of faithful and holie people.”

If the church congregation was to be such a company of The Faithful, the inevitable issue raised was how to determine just who were “The Faithful.” Who should be eligible to join the “holie companie”, and who should be excluded? Fairly typical of Separatist churches of the era, the requirements for admission to the original Plymouth

⁷⁸ Albert Vaughan and Francis Bremer, 237.

church were basically three: (1) a profession of faith, (2) outward behavior consistent with that profession, and (3) subscription to the particular church's covenant. "John Smyth, minister of the Separatist church established in Amsterdam in 1606, described the qualifications for church membership in these three simple propositions: The way of receaving in of members is fayth testified by obedience. Fayth is the knowledg of the doctrine of salvation by Christ. Obedience is a godly, righteous and sober life."⁷⁹

However, it was generally recognized a person could acquire and demonstrate knowledge of Christian doctrine, as well as display signs of obedience, without ever acquiring the "saving faith" that came solely from the gracious activity and election of God. The faith implied in a profession of faith was seen as an intellectual understanding of, and consent to, a set of doctrines. This *could* be solely the product of human instruction, and not necessarily the product of God's saving grace. The Puritans often referred to this as "general" or "historic" faith, distinguishing it from "saving faith," which is the gracious saving activity of God in the heart.

Sometime during the 1630s, a fourth criteria for church membership seems to have been added. Churches in New England started introducing tests of "saving faith" for prospective members. No longer would a simple profession of faith suffice; one must attest to the *experience* of a work of saving grace in his heart, thus "proving" his divine election before the examiners.

This requirement was clearly stated in a description of the admission procedures which the Plymouth church was following in 1669. The description was written in 1679 by John Cotton (son of the first John Cotton) who was then the minister. "The practice," he says, "was for men orally to make confession of faith and a declaration of their experiences of a worke of grace in the prescence of the whole congregation, having bin examined and heard before by the Elders in private and

⁷⁹ Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 45.

then stood propounded in publick for 2 or 3 weeks ordinarily.” Here, for the first time ... applicants for membership are [explicitly] required to make a declaration of their experience of a work of grace, that is, they must describe how they became convinced that they had received saving faith, and then must stand cross-examination about the experience. A test has been devised to make the church a company of people, each of whom, in his own opinion and in the opinion of the church, was destined for salvation.⁸⁰

The inevitable result was an inherently subjective criterion was now added to the otherwise objective and observable standards of faith evaluation. In a sense, this was not a wholly new development; discerning “saving faith” in relation to an individual’s assurance of salvation had long been a subject frequently discussed between separatist and non-separatist Puritans alike. Although saving faith was the free gift of God and necessary for entrance into the invisible church, it was believed to lay in the heart, where only God could graciously place it and where only God could thoroughly see it. Up until this time it was generally held that fallible, finite members of the visible church could not and, really, should not examine the hearts of others, for examining hearts was the sole prerogative of an infallible, infinite, omniscient God. However, individual Christians were increasingly anxious for some discernible signs of assurance they were genuinely recipients of God’s gift of saving faith. Therefore, an elaborate “morphology of conversion” began to be systematically developed and taught. E.S. Morgan summarizes and explains:

By the time Massachusetts was founded, two generations of Puritan writers had devoted themselves to describing the processes through which God’s free grace operates in the salvation of men. They wished to trace the natural history of conversion in order to help men discover their prospects of salvation; and the result of their studies was to establish a morphology of conversion, in which each stage could be distinguished from the next, so that a man could check his eternal condition by a set of temporal and recognizable signs.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 61.

Calvin had emphasized that it was impossible in this world to form a reliable opinion about whether or not a man is one of God's elect, one of those destined for salvation. He had nevertheless furnished a number of clues by which anxious Christians could predict their chances. He had made it clear, for one thing, that justification (the imputation of Christ's righteousness to man) depended on faith, not works, and that sanctification (the gradual improvement of a man's behavior in obedience to God) was the *product* of justification rather than the cause of it. Sanctification, therefore, though it could not in itself assist a man toward salvation, could be a sign that he was saved.

Sanctification, the leading of a holy life, was not, however, a strong enough sign to offer much comfort to poor, doubting Christians, for hypocrites could do good works and so could honest but unregenerate men simply by their own volition. The real problem was to find out whether or not one had saving faith, and Puritan ministers, therefore, set themselves to guiding their listeners and readers in detecting faith. **In a host of sermons and tracts that went far beyond Calvin,** they broke down the operation of faith into a succession of recognizable stages.⁸¹ (emphasis added)

Up until this point, the theological measures for discernment and evaluation used by the examiners were biblically defined and theologically consistent, the reasoning logical and objective. However, when the ministers started breaking down the operation of God's Spirit into this succession of myriad "recognizable stages" acted out on the platform of an individual's life, they ventured out of the objectively measurable and biblically defined into the subjective realms of individualistic human emotional experience and the individualistic human interpretation of that experience. Morgan continues:

William Perkins, for example ... identified **ten** stages in an individual's acquisition of faith. The first four were preparatory and began with attendance on the ministry of the word, which might be accompanied by some outward misfortune "to breake and subdue the stubbornness of our nature." When a man was thus made sufficiently pliable to the will of God, God brought him to a knowledge of the law, that is, a general understanding of what is good and what is evil. This understanding would eventually lead to an awareness of "his own peculiar and proper sins," which in turn led to the fourth stage, which Perkins called a "legall feare," but which later Puritans often designated as "conviction" of sin or simply as "humiliation." In this crucial stage the individual perceived his helpless and

⁸¹ Ibid., 67.

hopeless condition and despaired of salvation. Up to this point there was not necessarily any operation of saving grace; a man not destined for salvation could go this far and never get any farther. But God's elect, having arrived at a legal fear, found in their minds "a serious consideration of the promise of salvation, propounded and published in the Gospel." God then kindled a spark of faith in their hearts, that is, "a will and desire to believe." But no sooner was faith kindled than a combat began in which the soul must fight against doubt and despair by fervent, constant, and earnest invocation for pardon." This combat never ceased, but it eventually produced a feeling of "assurance" and persuasion of mercy. Thereafter followed an "Evangelicall sorrow," that is, "a grief for sin, because it is sin," and lastly God gave a man "grace to endeavour to obey his Commandments by a new obedience."⁸²

In effect, those who sought membership in the churches soon had to show not only evidence of a saving conversion experience but also a proper personal preparation for it if they were to satisfy the examiners.⁸³ Such scrutiny, however, seems to have begged the rhetorical Reformed question: Is saving faith solely a totally unmerited gift from God, or is saving faith a cooperative enterprise between God and the fervent, earnest efforts of the sinner? If the latter, then saving faith cannot by definition be the former; saving faith would be contingent upon human effort. The inescapable paradox seems to be that human volition and choice must be exercised to merit this "unmerited" work of divine grace. The line begins to become increasingly blurred in the attempts to define regeneration as a specific, discernable process of faith acquisition.

Morgan continues,

While all these phenomena, after the preparatory stages, were the work of saving grace, unattainable by human volition, **they all operated through the will of the individual concerned and required his active participation.** God had made a covenant of grace with him, and by grace he was enabled to strive against doubt and despair, to cry for pardon and sorrow for sin. As long as he remained in the flesh, the combat that began with the entrance of faith would go on. Even after he reached the stage of assurance, his doubts would continue. If they ceased, that would be a sign that he had never had faith to begin with, but had sincerely deluded

⁸² Ibid., 68.

⁸³ Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (NY, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 99.

himself and had not really entered into the covenant of grace. Delusion continually threatened, because the assurance wrought by grace was easily confused with the false assurance or “security” of the unregenerate. True assurance came only after attendance on the preaching of the word, and only after a period of doubt and despair. The faithful could always remember a time “when they had the spirit of bondage in themselves, which wrought much feare,” while those with false assurance “were never troubled with any feares or doubts this way.”

True assurance was also accompanied by the change in behavior, the obedience to God’s commands that Perkins had cited as the last stage of the working of grace, and which Puritans usually called sanctification. But sanctification, though an evidence of justification, was the kind of evidence most easily mistaken. Perhaps the surest mark distinguishing true assurance from false was its continuing imperfection: “the faithfull have not this assurance so perfect, but they are oft troubled with doubts and feares ... But they that have this false assurance are most confident, and never have any doubts.” **This was the constant message of Puritan preachers: in order to be sure, one must be unsure....** Though God’s decrees were immutable and no man whom He had predestined to salvation could fail to attain it, the surest earthly sign of a saint was his uncertainty; and the surest sign of a damned soul was security.⁸⁴ (emphasis added)

In 1609 Henry Ainsworth, pastor of the Separatist church in Amsterdam, had maintained the only way of testing for saving faith was by the examination of behavior and profession of faith, period. For Ainsworth, it was beyond human capacity and prerogative to probe further. In arguing with the Anglicans about whether their church contained any regenerate members, he asserted: “Faith is in the hart ... The hart no man knoweth but God alone. So then I ask you how you know that your members have true faith; Your answer must needs be, (unlesse you will make your self a God,) you know it not but by their words and works. Wel then, let us bring these to the trial; their confession and their practise: leaving their faith to God that knowes it.”⁸⁵ For Ainsworth, objective, observable, measurable “words and works” are the only ways open for human beings to examine the faith of other human beings.

⁸⁴ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 68–70.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

The fourth criteria which sought to discern inward “saving faith” grew out of a sincere desire to have an “holie companie,” a church of the “truly converted.” To determine whether a person was truly converted, the subject had to be examined, and as with any subject-oriented approach, subjective evaluations were the inevitable result. This was an examination of an area that, by definition, could not be catechistically taught and learned. It was an examination based on the subjective criteria of human experience and interpretation, not on the objective criteria of biblical teaching and doctrine. Its clear implication is that observable discipleship, outward obedience to the Lord, and intellectual assent to the tenets of faith are simply not enough; one must have a subjective, personal, mystical experience of some sort that passes the muster of the examiners in order to qualify for church membership. Biblically speaking, however, the only humanly measurable and observable “experience” which provides evidence of regeneration and the new heart is an obedient response to God’s Word.

First, faith is not defined in the Bible only in terms of the rational (understanding) and the irrational (experience). It is defined in terms of discipleship, which is moral and governmental. Understanding and experience are somewhat relative and come in varying degrees. Discipleship, however, means to be under the discipline of the Lord. One expresses his faith by submitting to Christ’s rule over him and living according to His way. Certainly understanding and experience are involved. But they are subservient to the objective, and grow in proportion to one’s obedience and submission to God’s law. God does not ... call men to understand and experience first, but He says to obey and then understanding will follow. Although it may be eventually revealed that the profession was false, nevertheless, it was a profession of faith. **Only objective disobedience will expose false faith.**⁸⁶ (emphasis added)

However well intentioned, this new test placed a tremendous stress on introspection of the self, and introduced a highly subjective, intensely emotional and

⁸⁶ James B. Jordan, *The Failure of the American Baptist Culture* (Tyler: Geneva Divinity School, 1982), 177.

potentially contradictory element into otherwise objective and observable biblical standards of discipleship and eligibility for church membership. Furthermore, it may have unnecessarily intimidated many who were genuinely faithful but were otherwise shy, reticent, inarticulate and/or socially awkward. Richard Baxter (1615-1691, called by Dean Stanley of Westminster “the chief of English Protestant Schoolmen”) criticized the practice as “taking a very few that can talk more than the rest, and making them the Church.”⁸⁷ Finally, this new examination bordered on usurping a prerogative reserved solely for the true Judge and Examiner of men’s hearts, a temptation which goes back to the Garden of Eden itself (Genesis 3:5). Richard Lovelace, in summarizing this historic development and some of its related difficulties, wrote:

Their object was to counter dead orthodoxy, mere “notional” or historical faith, by the doctrine of regeneration. Unfortunately, as the result of a rational manipulation of Reformed doctrine which went far beyond Calvin, they loaded into the conversion experience so much of the developed content of Christian growth that **in effect they required a man to be a practicing mystic before he could be counted a Christian.** Many Puritans insisted on telling the subjects of their evangelism that they were unable to turn to God without the sensible assistance of grace, and that the sovereign God might well refuse the non-elect entrance no matter how hard they sought. Not simply faith in the promises of God’s general offer of salvation, but mystical assurance of one’s individual acceptance with God, was therefore necessary for valid church membership. This approach to evangelism, which might keep the potential convert striving for months in a maze of subjective difficulties before he reached assurance, produced some great saints, men who were in a sense “pre-sanctified,” searched out in the deepest aspects of their lives and transformed. But while this net caught a few whales, it must have discouraged thousands of smaller fish. Some Christians, Dwight L. Moody for instance, start poorly in the First Act of the Christian life, but come to real magnificence in the Third or Fourth. It is not surprising that although Jonathan Edwards, in the revivals of the 1730’s and 1740’s, continued the Puritan teaching on conversion, most of Christendom was skeptical by the end of the eighteenth century. The popular jingle summed up the perplexities of hyper-Calvinism fairly well: **“You can, but you can’t; you will, but you won’t; you’re damned if you do, and damned if you don’t.”**⁸⁸ (emphasis added)

⁸⁷ Bremer, 99.

⁸⁸ Richard Lovelace, “The Sanctification Gap,” *Theology Today*, January 1973, Volume 29, No. 4 (<http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jan1973/v29-4-article1.htm>).

Again, I propose it is precisely here, in trying to systematize, establish and maintain this subjective fourth criteria of church membership that is inherently immeasurable and humanly indiscernible, that the Icarus of the Puritan errand flew too close to the sun. The practice of trying to discern “saving faith” — that is, men trying to discern and figure out who was “really saved” and who was not, even among their own children — by criteria other than the objectively measurable standards of verbal profession and outward behavior (“words and works”), may have only served in the long run to tragically undermine the Puritan vision of family, church and society. I believe this attempt to discern what was, frankly, ultimately indiscernible may have further served to exasperate the Puritan’s otherwise faithful, moral, theologically minded, honest, unpretentious and genuinely loving children. I offer this as a theory; perhaps some eager Ph.D. or Th.M. candidate with more time, resources and/or energy may search the matter out more thoroughly some day. However, speaking from the perhaps unscholarly and admittedly subjective personal experience of a now-grown child who generally sought to please and honor his godly parents, and as a father of three children who are also eager to please their parent, I would venture that the sort of inherent inconsistency displayed in this fourth criteria must have driven the Puritans’ children batty.

Historian Perry Miller summarizes this fourth criteria and his perspective on its inevitable results in the Puritan church, family and society:

The church polity established in New England was what today we call congregational. This meant, to put it crudely, that a church was conceived as being composed of people who could certify before other people that they had a religious experience, that they were qualified to become what the founders called “visible saints.” The founders were never so foolish as to suppose that everybody who pretended to be a saint was a saint, but they believed that a rough approximation of the membership to the covenant of grace could be worked out. A church was

composed of the congregation, but these were only the professing Christians. The rest of the community were to be rigorously excluded; the civil magistrate would, of course, compel them to come to the church and listen to the sermon, collect from them a tax to support the preacher, but they could not be actual members. Those who qualified were supposed to have had something happen to them that made them capable — as the reprobate was not — of swearing to the covenant of the church. They were able, as the others were not, physically to perform the act.

But we must always remember that even in those first days, when conviction was at its height, and among so highly selected and dedicated numbers as made up the Great Migration, only about one fifth of the population were found able, or could find themselves able, to take the covenant. The rest of them - with astonishingly few exceptions - accepted their exclusion from the churches, knowing that they were not “enabled” and praying for the grace that might yet empower them. From that point on, the story may seem somewhat peculiar, but after a little scrutiny it becomes an old and a familiar one: it is what happens to a successful revolution. The New Englanders did not have to fight on the barricades or at Marston Moor; by the act of migrating, they had their revolution. Obeying the biblical command to increase and multiply, they had children - hordes of them. Despite the high rate of infant mortality, numbers of these children grew up in New England knowing nothing, except by hearsay and rumor, of the struggles in Europe, never having lived amid the tensions of England. This second generation were, for the most part, good people; **but they simply did not have - they could not have - the kind of emotional experience** that made them ready to stand up before the whole community and say: “On Friday the 19th, I was smitten while plowing Deacon Jones’s meadow; I fell to the earth, and I knew that the grace of God was upon me.” They were honest people, and they found it difficult to romanticize about themselves — even when they desperately wanted to.⁸⁹ (emphasis added)

The Puritan’s Internal “Civil War”

In their attempt to establish and maintain a church of “visible saints” that would more closely approximate the membership of the invisible church, New England Puritans “...became experts at disappointing themselves. Lifelong anxiety and self-deprecation became the hallmarks of the American Puritan. He made a virtue of uncertainty until he came to identify feelings of assurance about salvation as signs of its absence. The only way to be sure was to be unsure. The only distinction it was safe to claim was that of

⁸⁹ Miller, 157.

being the chief of sinners.”⁹⁰ At the heart of this dilemma is an inherently contradictory, overly individualistic and obsessively introspective view of the self.

The Puritans’ understanding ... begins with Augustine: “Two loves have given origin to these two cities, self-love in contempt of God unto the earthly ... [and] love of God in contempt of one’s self to the heavenly.” As the Puritans developed and amplified the conflict, “self-versus-God” became the motivating force of their activism. So it appears in their definitions of the soul’s pilgrimage: as we “travaile towards grace” the “terme from which we travaile is ... Sathan, and ourselves.” **Most amply, it appears in the self-compounds, which they added to the [English] language.** Those that define the damned include self-affection, self-confident, self-credit, self-fullness, self-honor, self-intended, self-practice, self-safety, self-sufficiency; the few that mark the redeemed include self-emptiness, self-revenging, and (what Thomas Hooker called the Christian’s two chief lessons), self-trial and self-denial. Richard Baxter’s treatise on *The Benefits of Self-Acquaintance* contrasts the godliness of self-abasing and self-abhorring with the illicit acts of self-determination. His authoritative *Christian Directory* presents the contrast in full perspective: ‘Man’s fall was his turning from God to himself; and his regeneration consisteth in the turning of him from himself to God ... [Hence,] self-denial and the love of God are all [one] ... Understand this and you will understand what original and actual sin is, and what grace and duty are ... It is self that the Scripture principally speaks against ... The very names of Self and Own, should sound in the watchful Christian’s ears as very terrible, wakening words, that are next to the names of sin and satan.’⁹¹ (emphasis added)

This obsessive (and, some would say, obsessively morbid) Puritan preoccupation with the self might not be too simplistic to summarize in this manner: (1) the self is to be abhorred and never trusted. (2) Yet, any action, even the action of self-denial, always involves personal volition, i.e., an act of the will must originate in that abhorred self. (3) If any effort, even efforts toward righteousness, originates in that same self which is to be hated and never trusted, one can never, ever be sure one is acting from proper motives.

Sacvan Bercovitch expands further on this Puritan self-abasement; this is a rather extended excerpt, but I believe it is best read in its uninterrupted entirety:

⁹⁰ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Genuine Article: A Historian Looks at Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 19.

⁹¹ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 16-17.

Calvin sets out the Reformed position when he requires us to “rid our selves of all selfe-trust,” and his words resound throughout Puritan literature. “Not what Selfe will, but what the Lord will,” thundered Thomas Hooker. The self was “the great snare,” “the false Christ,” a spider’s “webbe [spun]-out of our bowels,” the very “figure or type of Hell.” To “lay downe God-self,” to root out “the Devils poison and venome or infection of Self,” was at once “to kill the old Adam” in us, to defeat the infernal “rebels against the commone good, all [of them] private respects of mens selves,” and to strike a blow against “Antichrist, that is, the SELFE in all.” “Lord,” pleaded the German pietist Jacob Boehme, “cast me down I pray thee to the ground in my received self, (I, that which is called I, or myself), and kill this self of mine through thy death”; “do thou overcome in me self (Or I, or I-hood, or I-ness,) that which we mean when we say ‘tis I ... cast my whole self down to the ground in thy death.”

The language in these passages conveys the dilemma of Puritan identity. The vehemence of the metaphors, the obsessiveness of the theme, the staccato syntax, the sense of clauses recoiling rather than progressing (since every gesture against I-ness contains its own counter-gesture), the interminable-because-unresolved incantations of the “I” over itself — **every aspect of style betrays a consuming involvement with “me” and “mine” that resists disintegration.** We cannot help but feel that the Puritans’ urge for self-denial stems from the very subjectivism of their outlook, that their humility is [contradictorily] coextensive with personal assertion. Necessarily, **the militancy they hoped would abase the self released all the energies of the self**, both constructive and destructive. Never was form more expressive of content than in their pervasive use of the personal mode, whether as confession (self-display as the chief of sinners), or as eulogy (fascination with famous men, from Nehemiah to Winthrop, who had presumably overcome their humanity), or as exhortation (appeals to the will to acknowledge its own impotence). All these works attest to the same impasse. All record the “Self Civil War” — as they repeatedly describe the struggle — of a Puritan Sisyphus, driven by self-loathing to Christ and forced back to himself by the recognition that his labors are an assertion of what he loathes. “Unto myself my Selfe my Selfe betray,” wrote George Goodwin in a popular early seventeenth-century poem; “I cannot live, with nor without my Selfe.”⁹² (emphases added)

The irony of this dilemma and internal struggle is that this attempt to deny one’s self is, at root, an interminably **SELF**-absorbed process. It is an inexorably narcissistic, time-consuming, emotionally draining vicious cycle constantly reenacted because it is utterly incapable of resolution: the individual affirming his identity by turning against his

⁹² Ibid., 17-20.

power of self-affirmation. Whether one chooses to like one's self or not, it is inescapable that to affirm the self and to turn against the self are both aspects of self-involvement.

Edward Taylor ... is broadly representative in this respect. His verses build on the tension between the need to write and the futility of writing: "I fain would praise thee, Lord, but when I would, --- I finde my Sin my Praise dispraises bring;" --- The futility then exacerbates the need: "[Shall] The little Bee present her thankful Hum? -- But I who see thy shining Glory fall --- Before mine Eyes, stand Blockish, Dull and Dumb?" The writing itself dwells on the discrepancy between words and truth, metaphor and reality, so that --- "Whether I speake, or speechless stand ... I faile thy Glory;" **and the poet uses that discrepancy as a rationale for talking forever about himself!** As Karl Keller notes, Taylor's poetry finally devolves upon Taylor in the process of preparation, simultaneously demanding meaning and confessing his own meaninglessness, in an endless (because interminable) ritual celebration-exorcism of the Puritan self.⁹³ (emphasis added)

This "endless (because interminable) ritual celebration-exorcism of the Puritan self" resulted in an almost monastic self-preoccupation, which demanded an enormous (and, I believe, enormously counterproductive) toll of time and emotional energy that might have otherwise been spent in productive service to God through ministering to family, church and community. The doctrinal development of this fourth test of church membership in seventeenth century New England, the examination for "saving faith," only served to exacerbate this dilemma, for it both elevated and abased the importance of the self. "The ritual was sustained by various doctrinal developments geared specifically towards the problems inherent in the auto-machia. One of these was the Puritans' pietistic voluntarism, which raised personal choice to the central position it held in humanist theology — without, however, losing sight of man's inability to choose

⁹³ Ibid., 20-21.

correctly. The same 'I' that once could not believe was the sole reliable witness - witness, judge, and historian — of the Lord's victory."⁹⁴

The self, which is not to be trusted nor believed because it is unable to choose correctly, nevertheless must at the same time be the trusted, believable chooser who is the sole "witness, judge and historian" of the Lord's power to save. Again, the words of the jingle lamenting hyper-Calvinism perplexities previously cited by Richard Lovelace come to mind: "You can, but you can't; you will, but you won't; you're damned if you do, and damned if you don't."

That "I" had learned that self-denial was complete when "the soule knoweth it hath nothing." But was it not, after all, the "I" that knew and had, even if nothing? And could the "I," having nothing, consider itself pure soul rather than a sinner in "krisis," freighted with the burden of self-identity? Such questions are implicit throughout the literature. By the rule of sola fides [faith alone] the Puritan had to come to terms with himself; by the terms of that confrontation he could not but admit his impotence; and through that shock of self-recognition he had somehow to reconstitute himself, still relying on the resources of the internal will, an 'exemplum fidei.' He tried to explain away the contradictions by claiming that in this case the will was not his own but the action of the Holy Spirit in him. The printed results of his efforts belie his claim. **The state of mind they reveal might be described as a schizophrenic single-mindedness.** With few exceptions, the myriad auto-machiae demonstrate that private insecurity is proportionate to public affirmation, just as, conversely, the [sheer] force of I-ness is transparent in the violent vocabulary of self-abhorrence. The struggle entailed a relentless psychic strain; and in New England, where the theocracy insisted upon it with unusual vigor - where anxiety about election was not only normal but mandatory - hysteria, breakdowns, and suicides were not uncommon. Nonetheless, the Puritans continued with increased energy to regiment selfhood by recourse to the exemplum fidei.⁹⁵ (emphases added)

Though church attendance was mandatory in seventeenth century New England, church membership was restricted to this "elite" who could prove, by their *self*-testimony,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 19-22. "Automachia(e)", Bercovitch explains, is the term 17th century Puritan poet George Goodwin chose to describe this "Self Civil War" which captures the profound Puritan ambivalence towards selfhood. "Auto" means "self;" "machia" comes from a Greek root word meaning "to fight."

⁹⁵ Ibid., 22-23. For the Puritan, 'exemplum fidei' denoted a type of Christ. For further reading and definition, see Bercovitch, pp. 9-10.

that they had the experience of receiving saving faith. Necessary to this testimony were such inherently antagonistic, contradictory elements as certainty about uncertainty, confidence of having no confidence, and assurance of having no assurance. The emphasis on this subjective test for saving faith for admittance to full membership undoubtedly, albeit unintentionally, may have caused a great number of genuinely regenerate Christian children, as well as many regenerate non-church members in the community, to be denied church membership and the sacraments and, in effect, to be treated as unbelievers. For some, the inherent contradictions must have caused them to simply roll their eyes and walk away from church examination. For those faithful who submitted to the examinations and failed, however, it more than likely would have created a sense of inadequacy and lack of self-confidence about personal faith that may have served in the long run to weaken their resolve and passion in spiritual matters.

Indeed, much of historical research indicates the need for a positive restatement of the generational crisis of seventeenth century New England. We have come to understand that the gradual collapse of the church-state was not directly due to the weakening of orthodoxy. Edmund Morgan, David Levin, Robert Pope, David Hall, Emory Elliot and others have argued that the second and third generations sustained the piety of the first. Decline in church membership after the mid 1650s followed at least partly from the **seriousness** with which the children responded to the demands of the fathers. Their sense of inadequacy, their hesitations about professing sainthood, suggest **intensity** of belief, not indifference (emphasis in the original).⁹⁶

Otherwise conscientious, moral, God-fearing members of the community, who doubted they had experienced (or, who doubted the necessity of experiencing) what their learned pastors, teachers and parents repeatedly told them was essential for salvation, or who were simply inarticulate, shy and/or otherwise socially awkward and fearfully unwilling to endure the thorough scrutiny these examinations entailed, were thus placed

⁹⁶ Ibid., 97.

at a tremendous disadvantage to be rooted, fed and nurtured in the faith.⁹⁷ Being denied church membership and the sacraments most likely would have served to discourage and weaken what faith they had.

Furthermore, this preoccupation with discerning what Calvin, Ainsworth, Robinson and others would have attested to be ultimately indiscernible may have inadvertently served to undermine Puritan culture throughout New England. If the family was indeed viewed as the first church, and if members of that first church were deemed ineligible to belong to the greater church, this must have inevitably caused a weakening strain on this foundational building block of Puritan society.⁹⁸ If a person came to the dismal conclusion he was not among the “elect,” and, in his mind, had no reasonable hope of ever being so, then it becomes epistemologically self-consistent for him to spend his time, energy and passion on other pursuits, rather than matters of church and spirit! Since approximately four-fifths of the communities were not church members, including many adult children of church members deemed ineligible for church membership themselves, the church would have of necessity become less and less significant over time. Seventeenth century New England church practices may well have inhibited and restrained some of the worst aspects of sinfulness in the social realm, but in the process

⁹⁷ Francis Bremer also asserts the decline in church membership may have been from too much piety, rather than the lack of it. “... Edmund Morgan and Robert Pope have both found evidence of a heightened scrupulosity in the colony. Individuals whose personal histories would have prompted them to present themselves for membership in the climate of the 1630’s were now less assured of the validity of their religious experience. This, rather than an actual decline in piety, might have been the cause of the decline of church membership.” Bremer, 147.

⁹⁸ A related tangent for possible further research would be to investigate if this contributed to the weakening of male leadership in the American home and church which seems so endemic today. After all, how could a father exercise authority as the “pastor” of the First Church (the home) if his authority was publicly undermined by his being deemed unqualified to be a member of the greater church?

may have inadvertently, ironically and tragically fostered a subtly cynical secularization and individualistic atomization of its own community and culture.

Analysis

In volume 3 of *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, John Gerstner writes what he calls “A Seeker’s Prayer,” based on his survey of Puritan teaching. He maintains this “prayer” encapsulates what the Puritans said, counseled and preached from their pulpits.

Dear God, whom I hate with all my being precisely because you hate and threaten me with hell, I hate this punishment perhaps even more than I hate you. Or, maybe I should say that I love my comfort even more than I hate you. For that reason I am asking a favor of you. I want you to make me love you, whom I hate even when I ask this and even more because I have to ask this. I am being frank with you because I know it is no use to be otherwise. You know even better than I how much I hate you and that I love only myself. It is no use for me to pretend to be sincere. I most certainly do not love you and do not want to love you. I hate the thought of loving you but that is what I’m asking because I love myself. If you can answer this ‘prayer’ I guess the gift of gratitude will come with it and then I will be able to do what I would not think of doing now — thank you for making me love you whom I hate. Amen.⁹⁹

As Perry Miller wrote — “They were honest people, and they found it difficult to romanticize about themselves - even when they desperately wanted to.” I believe Puritan children, having been raised by godly, loving parents who sacrificed a great deal for them, genuinely desired to reciprocate that love and sacrifice by seeking to please their parents. However, they simply could not comprehend, experientially, the emotional and dramatic intensity of religious conversion deemed necessary for church membership. I’m convinced it was not so much that they were obstinately *unfaithful* as it was they were

inherently *unable* to give “convincing display of saving faith” as defined by the church gate-keepers, which led to the perceived necessity of the Half-Way Covenant. Even though many were undoubtedly Christian in conviction, belief and practice, they simply did not have dramatic conversion experiences to recount. I’m sure most could never remember a time they “hated God,” which would mean, if Gerstner’s description is accurate, that much of what they were hearing in the churches was practically and experientially incomprehensible to them. Thus, they failed (and not willfully) to fully understand and/or comprehend the faith their parents were attempting to pass on. It is not unlikely that some went to the extent of even conjuring up some sort of a personal “experience” in a sincere desire to please parents and/or to qualify for admittance to the church; however, such well-intentioned deception, even if it is self-deception, can be a destructive root that eventually grows into cynicism, skepticism and, at worst, outright hostility toward the faith as the person matures.

I am convinced this fourth test of church membership served to drive a tragically unnecessary stake into the heart of the Puritan concept of the “First Church,” which in turn served to systematically weaken the greater church and Puritan society as a whole. As cited earlier, Cotton Mather wrote that families are “...the nurseries of our societies. When families are under an ill discipline, all other societies will be ill-disciplined as a result, [they] will [all] feel the error of that first concoction.” Mather may have been referring to discipline matters of morality and ethics; however, the ill discipline of ultimately incoherent theology can certainly result in a similarly destructive and eroding effect.

⁹⁹ John Gerstner, “A Seeker’s Prayer,” in *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3. Available from <http://www.apuritansmind.com/Puritan%20Evangelism/GerstnerJohnSeekersPrayer.htm>.

I believe had the Puritans not had this inherently self-contradictory and subjectively individualistic standard for membership in the greater church, and had their children (who, after all, were full-fledged members of the “first church” as baptized heirs of the covenant promise) not been denied membership in the greater church due to this subjective “standard,” then the original Puritan vision of the church being a “church of little churches,” or a “family of families,” may have endured and the churches might have continued to maintain and even increase their memberships.¹⁰⁰ I also believe it would have served as a tremendously compelling witness to the surrounding community, a community who certainly needed the attractive witness of enduring churches full of enduring families, the fundamental, foundational building block of a stable, safe and productive society that brings glory to God. It is certainly a witness that would speak loudly and compellingly to our culture and its fragmented families today.

It is families which are ready to become His witnesses that Jesus is looking for today. Around us we see the wholesale breakdown of family life. People are looking for help, desperately. Our country has never before experienced such flagrant disregard for law and order ... Parents opt out of their responsibilities to their children, to society, and to one another. Divorce rates climb. A befuddled society staggers under first one blow and then another struck at the very foundation of its structure. What it needs is not words, merely. It needs lived-out examples of good family life.... If advice and instruction were enough, we could address the words to masses of people. But the masses will only be reached by us — Christian fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters — who quietly begin to live out the kind of family life which God calls us to. In and through these lived-out examples, Jesus will find access into many a heart and home.¹⁰¹

As stated earlier, in spite of all their theological advantages, and in spite of all the preaching, teaching and admonition directed at them, the children of seventeenth century

Accessed January 2, 2005.

¹⁰⁰ As will be argued later in this thesis and in a sermon included in the appendix, the original Puritan vision, minus this fourth criteria, is the biblical, covenantal and arguably the most effective “strategy for church growth” that is too often minimized and/or ignored by the church and her consultants to this day.

¹⁰¹ Larry Christenson, *The Christian Family* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1970), 198.

Puritans did not seem to “get converted” to the satisfaction of the examiners. As a result, the number of full members in the churches gradually declined until the ecclesiastical structure could no longer hold together. Three centuries later, in an extensive 1989 study seeking to determine the causes of declining membership among mainline Protestant congregations, Drs. Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson and Donald Luidens concluded the failure and/or inability of children to understand their parents’ (and particularly, their *fathers*’) beliefs continues to have the same effect.

The mainline denominations do seem to be weak in the sense of being unable to generate and maintain high levels of commitment among a substantial portion of their adherents. Our findings also support ... that the mainline denominations did not suddenly become weak during the 1960s, but that their internal strength has been ebbing away for several generations. Many of our baby boomer respondents told us, for example, **that they had only the vaguest idea what their own parents - or more commonly their fathers - believed**, which suggests that silence on matters of faith is not new in many Presbyterian families. Moreover, we heard such reports from people whose parents attended church every Sunday.... In many cases, the family’s outward conformity was a thin shell that their children broke with ease when they left home.¹⁰² (emphasis added)

I remain convinced the key to genuine and lasting church re-formation, vitality and growth can be found in discovering and/or recovering the vision for what the Puritans viewed as the First Church, the Family. As best I can determine, the one enduring error of the seventeenth century New England Puritans was to insist upon this “measurement” of a standard that was inherently subjective and immeasurable, largely out of the experience of children raised by godly, loving parents, and, as will be explored later, devastatingly inconsistent with the covenant theology of the Reformers that the Puritans held so dear. I am convinced this fourth criterion unwittingly fostered a subjective, even narcissistic, individualism among Christians that is, at root, antithetical to Puritan

¹⁰² Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson and Donald Luidens, "Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline," *First Things*, vol. 31 (March 1993), 13-18.

thinking in general and classical Reformed theology in particular. This overweening and overwrought emphasis on the individual self, especially as applied to “conversion experience,” served to tragically weaken, rather than strengthen, the corporate, covenantal community at the heart of the Puritan vision, and I believe it has continued to seriously undermine and fragment the evangelical church throughout America’s history to this day.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Although not within the scope of this thesis to critique the period of the Great Awakening, I find an excerpt from 19th century Presbyterian theologian Charles Hedge very relevant to this discussion. He criticizes the subjective and experiential elements of George Whitefield’s practical theology, and the resultant negative effect it had on the ministry of local New England churches. This is from Charles Hedge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (American Presbyterian Press, [1851] 1983), II:89f., cited in James B. Jordan, ed., *Christianity and Civilization 2: The Reconstruction of the Church* (Tyler: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1985), 8: .

“It is impossible to open the journals of Whitefield without being painfully struck on the one hand with the familiar confidence with which he speaks of his own religious experience, and on the other with the carelessness with which he pronounces others to be godly or graceless, on the slightest acquaintance or report. Had these journals been the private record of his feelings and opinions, this conduct would be hard to excuse; but as they were intended for the public, and actually given to the world almost as soon as written, it constitutes a far more serious offence. Thus he tells us, he called on a clergyman, (giving the initials of his name, which, under the circumstances completely identified him,) and was kindly received, but found ‘he had no experimental knowledge of the new birth.’ Such intimations are slipped off, as though they were matters of indifference. On equally slight grounds he passed judgment on whole classes of men. After his rapid journey through New England, he published to the world his apprehension ‘lest many, nay most that preach do not experimentally know Christ.’ ... Whitefield was much in the habit of speaking of ministers as being unconverted; so that the consequence was, that in a country where ‘the preaching and conversation of far the bigger part of the ministers were undeniably as became the gospel, such a spirit of jealousy and evil surmising was raised by the influence and example of a young foreigner, that perhaps there was not a single town, either in Massachusetts or Connecticut, in which many of the people were not so prejudiced against their pastors, as to be rendered very unlikely to be benefited by them (from a Letter to Whitefield from Edward Wigglesworth, in the name of the faculty of Harvard College, 1745). This is the testimony of men who had received Mr. Whitefield, on his first visit, with open arms.”

CHAPTER THREE
A CALL FOR A “NEW OLD” PARADIGM,
OR
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
RETURNING TO A PLACE WE’VE NEVER REALLY BEEN

The Need to be Consistently Covenantal

Charles Hodge wrote: “In the sight of God parents and children are one. The former are the authorized representatives of the latter; they act for them; they contract obligations in their name. In all cases, therefore, where parents enter into covenant with God, they bring their children with them ... If a man joined the commonwealth of Israel, he secured for his children the benefits of the theocracy, *unless they willingly renounced them*. And so when a believer adopts the covenant of grace, he brings his children within that covenant, in the sense that God promises to give them, in his own good time, all the benefits of redemption, provided they do not willingly renounce their baptismal

engagements.”¹⁰⁴ (emphasis added)

In the view of the Reformers, the Bible indicates that faith is presuppositional; that is, faith is a foundation that is received by grace from God. It is not an attainment that can be achieved by human will or decision. The covenant child is to be taught to exercise belief from the beginning. Children of believers are entitled to certain benefits of the covenant, including (but not limited to) prayer and hearing the Word of God in the context of nurturing relationships in the home, the First Church, and in the greater church, the family of faith, as they participate in church life from infancy.¹⁰⁵ Just as children have a special place of familial belonging in the “first church,” the family household, so covenant children are to have a special place of familial belonging in the greater church, which is the family of families and the household of faith. Covenant children are to be raised like Timothy, who was taught the Scriptures from infancy and consistently urged to continue in what he learned (II Timothy 3:15). These children are to be taught they are members of God’s covenant family, they have responsibilities within that family, and the family of God has responsibilities concerning them.

As no natural child would ever be approached and/or treated as if he or she were “outside” the child’s natural family, no child of the covenant family should be routinely approached and/or treated as if s/he were “outside” the greater family of faith, as if s/he was an unbeliever. Children are considered members of the natural family (the First Church) by virtue of their birth, and unless deliberative steps have been taken to divorce and/or renounce that familial relationship, they remain members of that natural family

¹⁰⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 555.

¹⁰⁵ Susan Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant: Leaving a Legacy of Faith for the Next Generation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 98.

throughout their lives. The same should hold true for the children of the greater Family of families, the Church. Unless deliberate, observable, measurable steps to renounce and/or divorce their familial relationship with the church have been taken, the children of believers should always be considered members of that Family of faith and heirs of the covenant promises throughout their lives.

In my pastoral ministry, the liturgy I follow for baptisms¹⁰⁶ begins: “ ‘The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them (Ps. 103:17-18).’ ‘For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:39).’ God our Father, who has redeemed us by the sacrifice of Christ, is also the God and Father of our children. They belong, with us who believe, to the membership of the church through the covenant made in Christ, and confirmed to us by God in this Sacrament, which is a sign and seal of our cleansing, of our engrafting into Christ, and of our welcome in the household of God.”

Consistent covenant theology would treat children of believers as believers throughout their lives; they should not be considered at any time as those “outside the covenant” (i.e., the lost), unless deliberate, observable, measurable, intentional steps have been taken to renounce and/or divorce their familial relationship with the church. They are to be included in the family of faith, they are to be treated as believers, and they are to be taught, preached to, and held accountable as such. At no age should it be necessary to press the child to have a dramatic “conversion experience” so s/he can pass some sort of

subjective test of saving faith in order to be welcomed into the family. The child IS a member of the family. Jesus said the standard of faith was that of a little child (Luke 18:15-17). The seventeenth century New England Puritan insistence on a subjective test of saving faith seems to make it the opposite: The child must become like the adult.

The covenantal-biblical view of children is different, and creates a much more positive and constructive atmosphere for the child. Children are raised in the faith as members of the family, like Timothy; they are not to be raised in a sort of un-familial “you-are-outside-looking-in-until-you-‘become’-a-Christian” environment. The latter is simply inconsistent with the “family as the First Church” model. When children of the covenant are viewed skeptically, treated as if they are somehow “outside the Family” until they can articulate a passable testimony of a work of saving faith, it can have the counterproductive result of effectively fostering unbelief as well as subtly promoting an egalitarian equalization of authority that can undermine the family’s structure of authority and unity. Such children are encouraged to evaluate their faith from a subjectively “me”-centered point of view, with the implication that such things as objective obedience to the Lord, assent to biblical tenets and membership in the “First Church” are deemed inadequate unless and until one has had a personal “conversion” experience, preferably of a dramatic nature.

¹⁰⁶ From *The Book Of Common Worship, Approved by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: The Board of Christian Education Press, 1946), 121.

Understanding the Nature and Necessity of Conversion

What, exactly, is conversion? I submit that practically speaking, every step of objective obedience to the Lord is something of a conversion experience, as it involves a conscious decision to turn away from sin and turn to Jesus Christ. It may be argued only the truly regenerate can do that, but again, determining who is “truly regenerate” is not for us to discern. Conversion, in its simplest definition, is a turning to Christ. Does conversion happen only once in a lifetime, or does it happen many times? From my personal and pastoral experience, from my understanding of the Bible, and from insights learned from my research, I submit it is the latter. There are at least four general kinds of “personal conversion” experiences, all of them genuine, and all equally worthy of the church’s encouragement and support: ¹⁰⁸

- First, for a person totally outside the faith who comes to Christ for the very first time, there is an initial conversion experience. Incidentally, I think this kind of conversion actually applies to far fewer Christians than is commonly believed.
- Second, there is “daily” conversion. Each day — actually, numerous times during a typical day — we have to turn from sin and/or sinful tendencies, and turn (or, re-turn, turn back) to Christ. In the daily course of living in a fallen world we have need to “decide for Christ” quite often. These “little turnings” are so many daily conversions. It’s been my experience that modern evangelicalism does not

¹⁰⁸ The four categories contain insights from, but not limited to, James B. Jordan, ed. *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction* (Tyler: Geneva Ministries, 1986), 151-158.

call enough attention to the meaning, significance and importance of these multiple daily conversions.

- Third, there are the “crisis” conversions. These are similar in nature to daily conversions, but differ in degree of intensity. There are crisis points in every Christian’s life. At such crisis points, the Christian reaffirms his or her faith by making a major break with some problem that has crept up, some habit that has crept in, some unholy affection that must be sacrificed, and/or some bad direction one has been heading by making a major turn toward Christ.
- Fourth, there are what Ray Sutton¹⁰⁹ calls “stage conversions.” God brings Christians through various stages of growth and maturity, and at each stage it is necessary for the Christian to come to a fuller understanding of what it means to be a Christian and to give one’s “all” to the lordship of Christ. Each stage of life — childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, middle age, older adulthood — brings radical changes to a person’s understanding and comprehension. Mr. Sutton writes:

Now, I don’t think enough justice is done [in the church] to this matter of stages of life. As a person grows, his understanding of himself, of the world, and of God will change, because he is himself changing. His understanding grows wider, and embraces more factors of life. He becomes aware of things he was not aware of before. Moreover, his understanding grows deeper, and more profound. Learning to adjust to a spouse, and then to children; learning to adjust to authorities on the job, and learning how to relate to subordinates; learning how to manage money; etc. — all of these things cause a person to deepen and widen his understanding. Hopefully, they cause a person to become more and more wise and stable. These changes of understanding happen slowly and gradually, without our being aware of them. One day, however, we wake up and realize that we have changed. I am not the same person I was ten years ago, I realize. **And my understanding of God**

¹⁰⁹ In 1991, Sutton became the president of Philadelphia Theological Seminary, the seminary of the Reformed Episcopal Church.

and of His ways, of what it means to be a Christian, had better change too. My faith needs to deepen and broaden. Once again, I need to give all to Him, because my understanding of “all” has expanded.¹¹⁰ (emphasis added)

For example, the kind of Christian experience and conversion I had while a teenager in high school is not the only conversion of significance in my lifetime. Had I been examined for church membership in seventeenth century New England, however, I may have recounted that experience as a display of my having received “saving faith.” While it was a momentous experience, I now understand it was just one more of several life occasions when I realized I needed to turn all of my life over to Christ, for my comprehension of what “all” entailed was broadened as the scope of life experiences widened and my emotional development matured. While I can say my conversion in high school was a very important, necessary and even life-changing stage in my Christian development, it would be wrong, even perverse, for me to insist on that kind of Christian experience as *the* defining test of saving faith for those, say, who are adults living in the midst of a mature adult world, with all its cares, responsibilities and difficulties.

I used to testify with vigor that I was converted and became a Christian in December of my junior year of high school. I had gone forward in response to an invitation given at the end of a Billy Graham movie (“For Pete’s Sake”) the last Sunday in November, where I received a packet of literature from a kindly middle-aged woman who prayed for me, and then I went home. One week later, I was moved to actually read the literature, including the entire Gospel of John, provided in the packet. That night I prayed to “accept Christ into my heart” as the booklet directed; I then marked the attached card and dated it December 6, 1970. I proceeded in the ensuing weeks and months to get very involved with the ministry of Young Life. For years following, I

¹¹⁰ Jordan., 153.

would inform people I had not been a Christian prior to December 6, 1970. However, that is something I no longer say.

Was I not a Christian before? I can say now that I was. I was a child of the covenant. I had been raised by godly parents who carried out their end of the baptismal covenant, and they raised me in the faith the best they knew how, as had their parents and grandparents before them. To this day I can vividly recall a number of life-changing “conversion experiences” dating back to my earliest childhood memories. For example, I remember being enthralled and inspired by a book of Bible stories I had discovered in third grade, so much so that I just had to tell the pastor and my Sunday School teacher about it. I can recall the exhilaration and the spine-tingling awe I felt as a fourth grader when our little Methodist congregation rattled the rafters with their voices as they sang “The Old Rugged Cross” and “Rock of Ages”¹¹¹ week after week. I remember the thrill and delight I experienced when the Reverend Norman Hunter laid his hands on my ten-year-old head at my confirmation, and I vividly remember the tears that flowed at the week of church camp the following summer. I now understand these experiences, and countless others, were all genuine “conversion” experiences, conversions that occurred as I came to new stages of maturity and life experiences, stages at which I needed to understand and respond to Jesus Christ in a new, deeper, wider and more profound way. I was baptized as an infant, I believed in Jesus throughout my childhood, I tried to follow His precepts (albeit inconsistently, especially during my early adolescent years), I went to His church weekly to worship, I sang hymns, I prayed in His name. I experienced a “type

¹¹¹ Many years later I learned the humorous irony that the lyrics of this favorite hymn of that little Methodist church, “Rock of Ages,” were originally penned by Augustus Toplady as a direct broadside against the theology of Charles and John Wesley’s Methodism, particularly its perceived Arminian tendencies.

4” conversion my junior year of high school; at age 16, I needed to deepen my response of faith, and I’ve needed to do so countless times since. In fact, I will never cease needing to be “converted” this side of heaven.

In an essay entitled “The Baptist Failure,” Ray Sutton affirms the distinctive of covenantal theology discussed above, and critiques what he labels the Baptist alternative:

Covenantal theology has maintained that the basic unit of every sphere of society is the family, while Baptist theology sees the individual, usually very atomistically, as the foundation. There is no room in Baptist thought for seeing God claiming the child apart from the child’s decision, so that “decisionism” is always the tendency of Baptist thought. Except where the Reformed structures of thought have restrained the outworkings of Anabaptism, it has failed. Subjective theology has not only failed, it has led to the worst theological expressions with its implicit man-centeredness.¹¹²

As stated earlier, it is my premise that the seventeenth century New England Puritan practice of trying to discern “saving faith,” i.e., men trying to discern and figure out who was “really saved” and who was not, even among their own children, by criteria other than the objectively measurable standards of verbal profession and outward behavior (“words and works”), may have served in the long run to tragically undermine the Puritan vision of family, church and society at its root. As noted, it was inconsistent with the Puritan’s deeply held view of the covenant family as the “first church.” It was also inconsistent with the Puritan’s vision and operational conviction that the family (or household), not the individual, was the foundational building block of a healthy society. I believe it also created an overweening emphasis on one particular “type” of conversion at the expense of encouraging and emphasizing the Christian’s need for constant and ongoing conversions this side of eternity.

¹¹² Jordan, 159.

To discern the Puritan's fourth criteria of "saving faith" means some one must make that evaluation, and that evaluation will by necessity be made on the basis of the evaluator's own personal, individual, subjective experiences of faith. Due to the inevitable variability and sheer quantity of personal conversion experiences, one may not trust the salvation of another with a different personal experience, even if that person is a well-behaved, obedient, lovingly submissive, biblically literate and articulate member of the evaluator's own household. Thus, a potentially divisive wedge of cynical distrust and skeptical doubt is unnecessarily introduced, not only into the greater church, but into the families themselves. This test of saving faith bordered on treating the Puritan children of believers as "outside" the covenant, as unbelievers who must "prove" their salvation by subjective standards which go beyond words and works. This subjective, experiential, humanistically person-centered, individualistic test is subtly counterproductive to the fostering of a united Christ-centered fellowship in home and at church.¹¹³ That held true in the seventeenth century, and it holds true today.

¹¹³ Ibid., 170. Sutton writes, "Furthermore, it is even more obvious why God ordained the inclusion of infants in His objective covenant. One, since their baptism is a profession of faith, it is made for them and they are obligated to keep God's covenant by the baptism, not by the adult. The same thing happens when an adult is baptized. The baptism is the profession. Two, faith is imputed to them. This seems strange, but consider Hebrews 7:4-10, which teaches that Levi was counted as in Abram when Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek. Similarly, in baptism the faith of the child's covenant representative is imputed to him (see also I Cor. 7:14 - "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy."). **Third, the child of the believer is to be raised up in, not outside, the discipleship-discipline of the Lord** (Ephesians 6:4). That process is begun by baptism. He exercises faith by following God and keeping His commandments. To define faith in terms of knowledge or experience results in agnostic or enthusiastic salvation; defined in terms of verbal acknowledgment, it is decisional salvation.... The Baptist wants to measure real faith by inward and individual observation. **Man does not have this capacity.** The man who thinks he can, presents the real problem with the Anabaptist view of membership and government. It invests someone with the responsibility of making a subjective evaluation of another man's heart condition. But only God can penetrate a man's heart." (emphasis added)

It is a tenet of Reformed biblical theology that God alone is responsible for salvation, period. If we truly believe that, we can leave salvation up to Him, and not expend precious time, energy and resources trying to discern the humanly indiscernible, presumptuously assuming we can or should figure out who is “really” saved and who is not by any other standard than words and works. Personally and professionally, I find there is great freedom in trusting God in this. What we do know is salvation and life come from Jesus Christ. He is the Savior, Lord and Judge, and we can and should bear witness to our faith at every opportunity by getting on with the primary business of faithfully serving Him — discipling ourselves, our families and our churches and living lives of faithful obedience — which will provide an effective evangelical witness of Jesus Christ to our neighbors, our communities and our world.

Perpetuating the “Hereditary Religious Aristocracy”

Susan Hunt, Women in the Church Consultant for the Presbyterian Church in America, writes:

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Most church growth specialists agree that the key to church growth is for church members to invite their friends to church. Often this strategy is communicated by a pastor asking his congregation how many came to the church because a friend/neighbor/coworker invited them. The expected answer is usually given. A majority raise their hands, and we all assume that this is the most plausible strategy for church growth. Bad assumption.

I am not minimizing the importance of church members inviting unchurched friends to church. Reaching the lost with the Gospel is surely part of the Great Commission given to us by our Savior, and it is our privilege and responsibility to obey with zeal. **What I am saying is that this should not be the front line of offense in a church-growth strategy.**

The biblical model for church growth begins with covenant families. **The**

seed of Christian parents should be our primary target group. The first question that should be asked when communicating a strategy for church growth is: How many adult members have a “Timothy testimony” (2 Timothy 3:15) and have known the holy Scriptures “from infancy”? It is in answer to this question that we should see the most enthusiastic show of hands. It is affirmative answers to this question that will energize the church for the second wave of church growth, the unchurched.¹¹⁴ (emphasis added)

As cited earlier, Edmund Morgan asserted that the seventeenth century New England Puritans “... translated ‘Love thy neighbor’ into ‘Love thy family’; ...in the end, the church ‘was turned into an exclusive society for the saints and their children. Instead of an agency for bringing Christ to fallen man it became the means of perpetuating the gospel among a hereditary religious aristocracy.’”¹¹⁵ However, the process Morgan somewhat cynically labels the “perpetuation of a hereditary religious aristocracy” is precisely the most effective process to present Christ to fallen humanity, as well as the most practical means for contributing to the common good.¹¹⁶ Had the Puritans not had this inherently self-contradictory and subjective standard for membership in the greater church, and had their children, who were full-fledged members of the Puritan “first church,” not been denied membership in the greater church due to this “standard,” then the original Puritan vision of the church being a “church of little churches,” or a “family of families,” may have endured far longer than one generation, and their congregations would not have gone lacking for viable members. It all would have had a tremendously compelling witness to the community and culture then, and it is

¹¹⁴ Susan Hunt, 115.

¹¹⁵ Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 173.

¹¹⁶ The Puritan vision that should be at the heart of our evangelistic efforts is succinctly echoed in Eric Wallace, *Uniting Church and Home: A Blueprint for Rebuilding Church Community* (Round Hill, VA: Hazard Communications, Inc., 2003), 23: “Strong households are the core of strong churches, and strong churches are the foundation for outreach to our communities, nation and the world.”

certainly a witness that would speak loudly and compellingly to our culture and its fragmented families today.

We are to begin where we are, in our “Jerusalem,” perpetuating the “hereditary religious aristocracy.” We are to begin in our own homes, the “first church,” and with the children in our “family of families,” our churches. If we fail at doing that, it would seem unlikely “Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth” would give any credence to the integrity, viability and/or truthfulness of our witness. Mrs. Hunt goes on to cite statistics showing children of Christian parents are leaving the church in great numbers.¹¹⁷ She rightly observes no matter how many new converts we may bring in the front door of the church, if we lose our children out the back door, we are missing the starting point of our Lord’s Acts 1:8 imperative.

Why should they want what we have if it is not potent enough to hold on to our own children? We are not losing our children because the world has more to offer. The world holds out a lie. We have truth. The world cannot deliver on its promises. Our God is a promise-keeper. Perhaps one reason we are losing our children is the lack of emphasis we put on the educational ministry of the church.... A covenantal approach to discipleship or Christian Education combines biblical truth and compelling [cross-generational] relationships that will help fortify our covenant children against the onslaught of an anti-Christian culture. An energetic focus on

¹¹⁷ Scott Brown of Vision Forum (Source: www.trinitybaptist-church.org/files/RestoringBibOrder/Lost,BiblicalOrderForHomeandChurch.pdf) writes: “Read the Remarks of T.C. Pinckney who was elected 2nd Vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention. He made these comments to the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee regarding the state of our youth: ‘We are losing our children. Research indicates that 70% of teens who are involved in a church youth group will stop attending church within two years of their high school graduation. Think about that statement. It addresses only teenagers who attend church and participate in the youth group. What does that suggest about those teens who may attend church but do not take part in the youth group, or who do not go to church at all? In a talk at Southwestern Seminary, Josh McDowell noted that less than 1/3 of today’s youth attend church. If he is right and 67% do not go to church and then we lose 70% of those who do, that means that within two years of finishing high school only 10% of young Americans will attend church.’ Why is this happening? Many strands go into weaving a tapestry, and surely there are many reasons this tragic departure of our youth from Christ is taking place. However, I believe the evidence clearly indicates that the primary reasons are, first, our failure as Christian parents and churches and, second, the intentional, persistent, and highly effective effort by anti-theists to use public schools to lead children away from their parents and from the church.”

nurturing covenant children and covenant families will expand, not negate, going to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.¹¹⁸

Citing research showing that a large proportion of church-going people drop out of church between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, pollster George Barna stated that his research underscored the importance of families taking the lead in the spiritual

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 116. Also, on 123-125, Susan Hunt cites at length the following by Robert S. Rayburn ("The Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture, and Covenant Succession," *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review*, vol. 22, no. 2, (Fall 1996), 76-108): "I recently attended a church growth seminar.... Listed as topics for possible consideration were more than a dozen subjects bearing on ways and means to enlarge the church. **Conspicuous by its absence was any mention of anything having to do with the birth and subsequent nurture of the church's children**, even though it is easy to prove that since the church's beginning in Eden and still today the primary instrument of her growth has been that of covenant succession.... The remarkable phenomenon of succession of Christian faith through generations, fundamental as it is to the life of the church in the world, is provided a comprehensive explanation in Holy Scripture. **It is neither an actual coincidence that the largest number of Christians have Christian parents, nor is it simply a phenomenon left unaccounted for.** Everywhere in the Bible the Lord declares it to be his purpose that Christian marriages produce a holy seed (Mal. 2:15). One of the primary features of the covenant the Lord established with his people is that it embraces families and has always in view the continuation of its saving blessing for generations to come. The place this feature occupies in the divine economy of salvation is indicated by its comprehensive and emphatic reiteration throughout Scripture (e.g., Exod. 20:6; Deut. 4:37-40; Ps. 100:5; 102:28; 103:17-18; Isa. 44:3; 54:13; 59:21; 65:23; Jer. 32:38-39; 35:19; Ezek. 37:25; Zec. 10:6-7; Acts 2:38-39; 16:14-15,31). It must be plainly stated that the promise made to the children of the covenant is not that of a special status of privilege but is precisely the promise of the gospel, eternal life in heaven. Whether the form of the promise is that God should be their God (Gen. 17:7), or that he will extend to them his righteousness (Ps. 103:17), or his Spirit (Isa. 59:21), or his forgiveness (Acts 2:38-39), or his salvation (Acts 16:31), the covenant which thus embraces the children with their believing parents is the covenant of *grace*.

"...The biblical paradigm is for covenant children to grow up in faith from infancy.... It is imperative that the doctrine of covenant succession be recovered in our churches. Its loss has deeply diminished the church's appreciation of and wonder over the liberality and perfection of divine grace. Further, the appropriation by faith of this divine promise and summons is the means appointed to furnish the church with generation after generation of great multitudes of Christian servants and soldiers who reach manhood and womanhood well taught, sturdy in faith, animated by love for God and man, sophisticated in the ways of the world and the Devil, polished in the manners of genuine Christian brotherhood, overshadowed by the specter of the Last Day, nerved to deny themselves and take up their cross so as to be counted worthy of greater exploits for Christ and Kingdom. Presently the church not only suffers a terrible shortage of such other-worldly and resolute Christians, superbly prepared for spiritual warfare, but, in fact, is hemorrhaging its children into the world. Christian evangelism will never make a decisive difference in our culture when it amounts merely to an effort to replace losses due to widespread desertion from our own camp. The gospel will always fail to command attention and carry conviction when large numbers of those who grow up under its influence are observed abandoning it for the world ... inscribing the doctrine of covenant succession upon the heart of family and church must have a wonderfully solemnizing and galvanizing effect. It will set Christian parents seriously to work on the spiritual nurture of their children, equipping them and requiring them to live the life of covenant faith and duty to which their God and Savior called them at the headwaters of life. And, ever conscious of the greater effect of parental example, they will forsake the easy way, shamelessly and joyfully to live a life of devotion and obedience which adorns and enables the faith in the eyes of their children. This they will do, who embrace the Bible's doctrine, lest the

development of children, working cooperatively with the greater Family of faith in the teaching, nurturing and discipling process: “In situations where children became mature Christians, we usually found a symbiotic partnership between their parents and their church; the church encouraged parents to prioritize the spiritual development of their children and worked hard to equip them for that challenge. Parents, for their part, raised their children in the context of a faith-based community that provided security, belonging, spiritual and moral education, and accountability. Neither the parents nor the church could have done it alone.”¹¹⁹

Other research confirms most young people who disaffiliate with the church actually do so by the time they are sixteen, not eighteen. According to these sources, youth who drop out of the church do so not when they leave the home for college or work, as is often assumed, but most often while they are still in high school.¹²⁰

The struggles of retaining young adults in my own denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA), seem to be typical of that in other mainline churches, all of which have had increasing difficulty hanging on to their children once they become young adults. In 1988, Dr. Thomas Gillespie, then-president of Princeton Theological Seminary, stated in his address to the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s 200th General Assembly, “The truth of the matter is that the chief cause of our membership decline is our inability over the past quarter of a century to translate our faith to our children. Put simply, we are unable to keep our children in the church when they become adults. As a result, we are not only a

Lord on the Great Day should say to them: “You took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them to idols.” (emphasis added)

¹¹⁹ <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=153>.

¹²⁰ Mark DeVries, *Family Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 25. Mr. DeVries also notes: “William Willimon and Robert Wilson describe this crisis from the perspective of the

dwindling church but an aging church as well.”¹²¹

In their book, *Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry*, authors Merton Strommen and Richard Hardel ask the question, “Why are churches losing their children?” Their answer:

[It is] because the tradition of passing on the faith in the home is disappearing for many members of Protestant and Catholic congregations. A study conducted in 1980, called “Young Adolescents and Their Parents,” involved a national random sample of eight thousand adolescents whose parents were members of congregations in eleven different Protestant and Catholic denominations. The study showed that “God, the Bible, or religious things” are seldom discussed in church homes. Only 10 percent of church families discuss its faith with any degree of regularity; in 43 percent of the homes in these denominations, faith is **never** discussed. A similar study conducted in 1986 involved 7,551 students from 196 randomly selected Catholic schools. When asked how often their family talks about religious things, only 17 percent of the students claimed to discuss such topics at least once a week. In 1990 a national sample of youth and adults from six major Protestant denominations was asked the same question. Their response was no better: 35 percent of the youth, ages sixteen to eighteen, said they rarely if ever talked about faith or God with their mother, and 56 percent reported not *ever* having such discussions with their father. As is obvious from these percentages, **faith sharing is not happening today in most families of the church.**¹²² (emphasis added)

As the Puritans well understood, the family is *the* God-ordained institution for passing faith on from one generation to the next; as noted earlier, this primary ministry was rightly and vigorously encouraged, supported and even enforced by the greater church in seventeenth century New England. Again, in the words of Thomas Taylor, cited at the beginning of this thesis: “Let every master of a family see to what is called, namely, to make his house a little church, to instruct everyone of his family in the fear of God, to contain every one of them under his holy discipline, to pray with them and for

United Methodist Church. They target their denomination’s ‘inability to retain ... young people, after their maturity, in the church’ as one of the chief causes of decline in their denomination.”

¹²¹ Thomas Gillespie, “The Way Back Leads Nowhere: Report of the Standing Committee on Theological Education”, address to the 200th General Assembly, *The Presbyterian Outlook* (July 18, 1988), 6.

them.... Many complain of evil times and general corruption: and many [who] talk of want of discipline in the church, or good laws in a state, will not mend things till thou mend thy family. If all families, where reformation must begin, were brought in to this discipline, our eyes should see a happy change.”¹²³

Over the years, this Puritan vision of the family as the first church seems to have been largely lost and/or long forgotten. Perhaps this is at least partly due to the atomizing influence of this anomalous and even aberrant emphasis on “me-centered” conversion that confused the Puritan vision at its root. For the most part we now have program-centered, results-oriented churches in which parents in general and fathers in particular often find themselves on the sidelines, instead of fully in the game, shaping their children’s faith and lives.

For example, one nearly universal program in churches today is the Sunday School. Sunday School is generally accepted today as the primary location and vehicle for the biblical education of children of the church, largely taking the place of parental (or paternal, for that matter) instruction in the home. Sunday School was founded in Britain in the late 1700s by Robert Raikes, who viewed it as a means to reach “the children of poor parents who had rejected the gospel.”¹²⁴ It was originally designed to provide basic education for poor children on the one day of the week they would not be working, and the content was not specifically confined to biblical teaching; it was more of a general instructional nature. The idea of Sunday School soon caught on in America. By the early to mid 1800s, the Methodists, Lutherans, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and

¹²² Merton P. Strommen and Richard A. Hardel, *Passing On The Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry* (Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 1989), 14.

¹²³ Cahill, 71-72.

Baptists all had their own Sunday School ministries. As the twentieth century progressed, Sunday Schools began to serve as part of the regular teaching program of the church, and no longer was it just an outreach for un-churched youth.¹²⁵

In the late nineteenth century, southern Presbyterian L.J. Wilson lamented Sunday School was gradually taking the place of home instruction in the Bible. Reflecting on several generations of Presbyterians in his family who had benefited from family worship, devotions and paternally led Bible instruction, he rejected the assumption that weekly classes by a Sunday School teacher lacking in parental authority should or even could substitute for Christian instruction in the home. He wrote, “On Sabbath morning they are hurried off to Sunday school where the teacher strives for thirty to forty minutes to teach them lessons they ought to have been taught at home during the week. And this is all the religious instruction the little ones get. What will be the effect upon the coming generation? It is a sad subject to contemplate.”¹²⁶

It seems that L.J. Wilson’s rather pessimistic assessment of Sunday School was vindicated. In the 1980s the Lilly Foundation funded a series of studies of the decline of mainline Presbyterianism. It was assumed the decline was related to a decline in Sunday School participation, which seemed to precede membership decline. A sample of adult church members and non-church members who had grown up as Presbyterians was asked about Sunday School attendance. It was discovered rather unexpectedly that both groups were equally likely to have been regular attendees of Sunday School in their childhood years, which would seem to indicate Sunday School was not particularly effective.

¹²⁴ Kerry Ptacek, *Family Worship: Biblical Basis, Historical Reality, Current Need* (Greenville: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press, 1994), 64.

¹²⁵ Wallace, 48.

¹²⁶ Ptacek, 65.

“Comparisons show that about the same percentage of church and unchurched Americans received religious instruction as children in Sunday Schools. Those who also received such instruction at home are far more likely to be active in churches.”¹²⁷ The study probed further and found that while adult church membership was unrelated to Sunday School attendance, the experience of childhood religious instruction in the home correlated very positively with adult church membership.¹²⁸

In his book *The Family Friendly Church*, Ben Freudenburg writes, “I’m convinced we must shift from a church-centered, home-supported ministry model to a home-centered, church-supported ministry model. I now believe that parents are the primary Christian educators in the church and the family is the God-ordained institution for faith-building in children and youth and for passing the faith on from one generation to the next.” He urges churches to shift their programming and structure to a home-centered, church-supported model for nurturing Christian faith and practice, to “work out a home-based ministry strategy that will give our kids a better chance to develop a passion for following Jesus”¹²⁹ from the earliest ages onward. He calls for an entirely new paradigm shift from a “church-centered, home-supported ministry to a home-centered, church-supported ministry.”¹³⁰ In effect, this is actually a call to return to an

¹²⁷ Louis B. Weeks, “Why We’ve Lost Members: Preliminary findings in a study show the reasons may not be what you think,” *Presbyterian Survey* (May 1989), 21. Cited in Ptacek, 65.

¹²⁸ Wallace, 48.

¹²⁹ Ben Freudenburg and Rick Lawrence, *The Family Friendly Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1998), 28.

¹³⁰ A similar note is echoed in Strommen’s and Hardel’s *Passing On The Faith* (16-17):

Church leaders increasingly realize that what is happening or not happening in the life of a child is directly related to what is happening or not happening in the home. Leaders recognize that in order to pass on the faith from generation to generation, **a new paradigm of ministry is needed — one that is holistic and connects children, youth, family, congregation, community, and culture.** The current paradigm has subtly conveyed the impression that faith is nurtured only in the church buildings. This has ultimately institutionalized the faith, a phenomenon found in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.

older paradigm, rather than a wholly new paradigm. This is a call to return to the seventeenth century New England Puritan vision of the family as the first church.

In working out a framework for this “home-based ministry strategy,” that is, what a home-centered church would “look like,” Freudenburg encourages churches to constantly ask themselves evaluative questions such as: (1) What does a church look like that really believes the family is the place God intended for faith to be passed on from generation to generation? (2) Are parents ultimately responsible for nurturing faith in their children, and if so, how is a church structured to model that belief? (3) What would worship look like? (4) What are the rules and regulations that govern a family-friendly church’s practices and programs? (5) What classes would it offer? (6) If the church had a school, how would it include parents? (8) Do we need to go back to an old paradigm for ministry, or do we need to change to meet the challenge of an entirely new paradigm?¹³¹

In response to that last question, it is the central theme of this thesis that we do need, and need desperately, to go back to an old paradigm for ministry, which is the seventeenth century New England Puritan paradigm. We need to recapture and return to the Puritan vision of the family as the First Church, and the greater church as the “family of families,” consistently and constantly striving to connect individuals, families and generations with each other in a mutually supportive, nurturing, communal and faith-

The teaching and nurturing of faith in Protestant congregations today is associated primarily with the church building. Over the years the message has been, ‘Let the professionals do the teaching. They know best.’ So parents send their children to the church for Sunday school or other religious instruction, handing the responsibility of faith education to the teachers. Parents who believe their responsibility has ended when they have transported their children to church schools are not bad parents, however. **They simply do not know how to nurture the faith because it probably was not modeled in their own homes when they were growing up.** The good news is that some parents want to learn how to form and nurture faith in their children; they want to participate in the family-congregation partnership. (*emphasis added*)

enhancing manner that will serve to strengthen individual families, churches and society. By research, reason and experience, I am thoroughly convinced recovery of this vision is sorely needed in our churches and families today. In so returning, we need to do away with the subjective, experiential, person-centered, individualistic “tests” of saving faith that so weakened the Puritan vision at its core. In so doing, I believe the church would be “returning” to a place we may have never really been before.

What Mr. Freudenburg refers to below as the “old” paradigm is actually the modern paradigm, the one that has been existent in most American churches since the turn of the twentieth century to the present day. And what Freudenburg calls the “new paradigm” meshes almost seamlessly with the older Puritan paradigm. He writes:

Under the old paradigm, the rules and regulations that governed Christian education were based on a church-centered, home-supported faith-development model. That model dictated that the home do all it could to provide support and resources for the church to teach the faith. The home helped the church be the best it could be. As a result, the church said, “Come to us for learning about and growing in the faith. We want to build a strong church.”

Under the new paradigm, the rules and regulations that govern Christian education are based on a home-centered, church-supported faith-development model. The new model dictates that the church do all it can to provide support and training for parents in the development of their kids’ faith in their homes. The church exists to partner with homes to be the best they can be. The result: The church says, “Come to us to learn how to teach the faith in your home. We’ll be a resource of ideas, training, and programs, and we’ll provide you with everything you need to teach the faith at home. **Strong homes make strong churches.**”¹³²

As stated on the first page of this thesis, the Puritans saw the family as the foundational unit of society; more importantly, they saw the family first and most importantly as a little church in itself. The family was the primary foundation and the basic building block not only of a healthy society, but of a healthy church. They, too,

¹³¹ Freudenburg and Lawrence, 60.

¹³² Ibid., 108.

believed parents were the primary Christian educators in the church; the first church being the home itself. They, too, believed the family was the God-ordained institution for building faith in young people, nurturing that faith through the various stages of the young person's maturity and growth, and for passing that faith on from one generation to the next. Strong homes made strong churches, and strong churches made strong communities. Freudenburg continues defining his "new" paradigm, which, again, echoes the old paradigm of the seventeenth century New England Puritans:

Now, since we've been shifting our church's vision away from a church-centered paradigm and toward a home-centered model, our mission has stayed the same. But our goals for accomplishing that mission have drastically changed. We no longer believe the church is the center of faith formation; that's the home's territory. **We've come to believe that the home is the primary agency for faith formation.** While there are many church 'agencies' God uses to nurture faith, it is our conviction that the primary agency is the Christian home.... The congregation supports homes as it equips them to pass on the faith and mobilizes for ministry those living there. The homes [are to be] grace places where the love of Christ heals and cares for those living there — places where the people of God worship, are nurtured in the faith, and are energized to be servants of Christ in the world. (emphasis added)¹³³

As homes and families are thus strengthened, equipped and encouraged by the church as primary agencies of faith formation and development, this results in children becoming more anchored, established and confident in their faith as well as providing a more compelling and effective witness to the community and world beyond.¹³⁴

¹³³ Ibid., 108

¹³⁴ The restoration of the Puritan vision of the Family as the First Church is also finding expression in the Roman Catholic Church today. Diana Garland notes in *Family Ministry* (291-293):

In a homily in Perth, Australia, Pope John Paul II made the following statement: "The family is the domestic church. The meaning of the traditional Christian idea is that the home is the Church in miniature. The Church is the sacrament of God's love. She is a communion of faith and love. She is a mother and teacher. She is at the service of the whole human family as it goes forward towards its ultimate destiny. In the same way the family is a community of life and love. It educates and leads its members to their full human maturity and it serves the good of all along the road of life. In its own way it is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. The future of the world and of the Church pass the way of the family." (November 30, 1986; in Lynch, Preister and Ad Hoc Committee on Marriage and Family Life 1988)

The congregation is a partner with homes, providing all it can to nurture and equip them at church for their ministry in the workplace, at school, in the marketplace, in neighborhoods, and in places of recreation. We're called and sent to transform communities with God's love and grace through Jesus Christ. Therefore the people of God gather often as a congregation for encouragement, support, and training — only to return to their homes to be energized and sent into the world as witnesses for Jesus. The church evaluates its effectiveness not only by those coming to church but by those it sends equipped to their homes, communities, and the world. When family members leave their home to enter the community sphere — whether to jobs, schools, the grocery store, the health club, or the Little League diamond — they go as faithful representatives of Jesus. The more the church helps equip homes for their role in the community, the more homes make an impact on that community and the greater influence Christ has in the world. The church shapes the homes, and the homes impact the people who live in the community. In this model, the church is poised to impact the world through faith-shaping homes.¹³⁵

In his recent book, *Transforming Your Children Into Spiritual Champions*, George Barna reports a person's lifelong behaviors and views are generally developed at a very young age, well before they reach the teenage years. He cited research displaying four critical outcomes:

First, a person's moral foundations are generally in place by the time he or she reaches age nine (!). While those foundations are refined and the application of those foundations may shift to some extent as the individual ages, the person's fundamental

According to the Catholic Church, the mission of the family encompasses four distinct but interdependent tasks: (1) The family is to form an intimate community of persons; (2) The family is to serve life in its transmission, both physically by bringing children into the world, and spiritually by handing on values and traditions as well as developing the potential of each member to serve life at every age; (3) The family is to participate in the development of society by becoming a community of social training and hospitality, as well as a community of political involvement and activity; and (4) The family is to share in the life and mission of the Church by becoming a believing and evangelizing community, a community in dialogue with God, and a community at the service of humanity. The significance of this portrayal of families is twofold. First, families serve as significant 'feeder' systems for the church, providing it with members and leaders nurtured in the bosom of faithful families. Second, the family serves as an *example* to the church. If family is the most basic church, then the church, to be effective, should emulate the characteristics of family life at its best and most faithful. Wendy Wright points to the difference it would make if churches were modeled more carefully after family: "This way of viewing family as domestic church could have profound consequences for the larger gathered Church if the wider body truly began to learn from families what it means to be Christian community." Perhaps church as "the professionals doing for the nonprofessionals" or church as 'committees that direct programs,' or church as 'fix-it shop for crises' or church as 'social club' might give way to a renewed vision of Christian community.

perspectives on truth, integrity, meaning, justice, morality, and ethics are formed quite early in life. After their first decade, most simply refine their views as they age without a wholesale change in those leanings.¹³⁶

Second, a person's response to the meaning and personal value of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection is usually determined long before a person reaches the age of eighteen. In fact, a majority of Americans surveyed made a lasting determination about the personal significance of Christ's death and resurrection before age twelve.¹³⁷

Third, data is cited indicating that, in most cases, people's spiritual beliefs are irrevocably formed when they are pre-teens. Upon comparing data from a national survey of thirteen-year-olds with an identical survey among adults, he found the belief profile related to a dozen central spiritual principles was identical between the two groups. Those beliefs included perceptions of the nature of God, the existence of Satan, the reliability of the Bible, perceptions regarding the after-life, the holiness of Jesus Christ, the means of gaining God's favor, and the influence of spiritual forces in a person's life.¹³⁸ In discussing his research which led to the book, Mr. Barna notes:

In essence, **what you believe by the time you are thirteen is what you will die believing**. Of course, there are many individuals who go through life-changing experiences in which their beliefs are altered, or instances in which a concentrated body of religious teaching changes one or more core beliefs. However, most people's minds are made up and they believe they know what they need to know spiritually by age thirteen. Their focus in absorbing religious teaching after that age is to gain reassurance and confirmation of their existing beliefs rather than to glean new insights that will redefine their foundations.¹³⁹ (emphasis added)

¹³⁵ Freudenburg and Lawrence, 110

¹³⁶ George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority* (Ventura: Regal/Gospel Light, 2003), 58.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹³⁹ Cited on www.barna.org/BarnaUpdateID=153. When I shared this note in a sermon, the junior high Sunday School teacher of our church made the wry observation, "Framed another way, it seems that most adults surveyed have the understanding of a thirteen-year-old in matters of faith."

Fourth, the research revealed adult church leaders usually have had serious involvement in church life and training when they were young. The statistics gathered from a national sample of pastors, church staff and lay leaders showed more than four out of five of those leaders had consistently been involved in a ministry to children for an extended period of years prior to age thirteen. Mr. Barna asserts his research produced a turnaround in his own views about ministry:

Since I became a Christian two decades ago, I have always accepted the dominant notion: the most important ministry is that conducted among adults. But the overwhelming evidence we have seen of the huge impact in the lives of kids and the relatively limited changes in the lives of adults has completely revolutionized my view of ministry. I have concluded that children are the single most important population group for the Church to focus upon. Many churches may not go that far, but I do hope that they will at least consider the research findings and place a greater emphasis upon children. Such a shift in priorities could well bring about the spiritual renaissance that many church leaders have long been praying for.¹⁴⁰

While acknowledging that the family is central to a strong church and a healthy society, Barna rightly calls the church to a heightened awareness of the strategic necessity of quality ministry to children. His research and experience has led him to conclude “children are the most important population group to focus upon.” However, as research has *also* confirmed that parents are the most influential people in a child’s faith development, and as evidenced by the mixed long-term results of children’s ministries such as Sunday School, it may be unproductive or even counterproductive to prioritize children’s ministries without an equal prioritization of equipping and encouraging parents as they minister in the homes. As Pamela Erwin observes in *The Family Powered Church*:

Churches may spend thousands of dollars on programs for children and youth, and they may hire children’s pastors and youth pastors; but, although those programs

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

are essential and wise investments, parents have the greatest influence on a young person's faith development. Evangelism and discipleship are not solely the work of the church. Parents are a vital component — the most important component. We must shift from viewing the church as the *primary* faith-shaping agent to viewing the church as a *supporting* agent for the family in the evangelism and discipleship of children. In this case, the church functions as a part of the family — offering training, support, and encouragement for parents and functioning in the relationship of brother, sister, elderly uncle or aunt, or surrogate father or mother when necessary. This means that part of the evangelism and discipleship of children and youth is the strengthening of parents, who in turn strengthen the entire family.¹⁴¹

Reconnecting Disconnected Generations

My pastoral experience these past twenty-plus years confirms Pamela Erwin's observation that too many well-intentioned efforts to minister to children and youth have had the counterproductive effect of further isolating them from family and/or meaningful contact with adults. Our culture and our churches have systematically isolated young people from the very family and extended family relationships that are most likely to lead them to maturity; these very relationships that the seventeenth century Puritan believed to be foundational to a healthy church and society. Instead of working to enhance the development of healthy cross-generational relationships, the efforts of the organized programmatic church and parachurch may have unwittingly served to weaken them.

From a secular perspective, editorialist Mary Pipher believes this isolation and segregation in our society is the cause of many current ills. She comments in *USA Weekend* (March 19-21, 1999), 12: "A great deal of America's social sickness comes from age segregation. If ten fourteen-year-olds are grouped together, they will form a Lord of the Flies culture with its competitiveness and meanness. But if ten people ages two to eighty are grouped together, they will fall into a natural age hierarchy that nurtures

¹⁴¹ Pamela J. Erwin, *The Family Powered Church* (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2000), 68.

and teaches them all. For our own mental and societal health, we need to reconnect the age groups.”¹⁴²

Mark DeVries cites a disturbing study that revealed teenagers spend *less than seven percent* of their waking hours with any adults, while spending approximately *half* their time with peers. Emotionally available parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors and adult church members are increasingly rare in our fast-paced, mobilized culture, and the number of children who need care “... vastly outpaces the number of adults who choose to be available to them.”¹⁴³ DeVries cites Cornell University’s Urie Bronfenbrenner’s study of nine cultural shifts that have taken place during the past generation, changes which have increasingly caused separation of children and youth from the world of adults, especially the adults in their own families.

1. Fathers’ vocational choices that remove them from the home for lengthy periods of time
2. An increase in the number of working mothers
3. A critical escalation in the divorce rate
4. A rapid increase in single-parent families
5. A steady decline in the extended family
6. The evolution of the physical environment of the home (family rooms, playrooms and master bedrooms)
7. The replacement of adults by the peer group
8. The isolation of children from the work world
9. The insulation of schools from the rest of society

¹⁴² DeVries, 36.

This last factor caused Bronfenbrenner to describe the current U.S. educational system as “one of the most potent breeding grounds for alienation in American society.” Though he wrote these words in 1974, the trend toward isolation has not been significantly checked since that time; if anything, it has accelerated.¹⁴⁴ In neighborhoods, schools, social activities, their own families and even at church, children and young people are afforded less and less opportunity to be with adults.

Chap Clark, Associate Professor of Youth and Family Ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary, addresses this problematic isolation and fragmentation, and the church’s unwitting contribution to it, in his forward to *The Family Powered Church*:

The postmodern church is facing a looming crisis of inconceivable magnitude. This crisis is the result of the subtle yet sweeping decision to shift the church’s primary task from building a strong, vibrant faith community that is called, empowered, and equipped to serve a lost, broken world to developing a programmatic structure that separates and segments the church into small, generationally homogeneous, unconnected factions.

“*Fragmentation*” is the most apt description of the postmodern church. After years of striving for perceived programmatic excellence and trying to inaugurate a church growth strategy that “consumers” will respond to, we have allowed the proverbial programmatic tail to wag the dog. The church has become a programmatic shell around which the various other ministries of the church loosely orbit.

On any given Sunday, a family of five will arrive and disperse into separate rooms to take part in various educational or worship experiences that are rarely philosophically, or even strategically, connected. Then, following the lesson or service, they all climb into the minivan and drive home, with virtually no relational or spiritual family connection.

...The fragmented church hurts even the healthiest, most “together” family as well as the nontraditional family that needs support. The programmatic segmentation in today’s churches leaves healthy families on their own to find time for intimate Christian community and worship. It leaves single people trying to somehow fit in with others of like status, and it leaves divorced and single-parent families struggling from a lack of meaningful support.

...In the church today, we need all the help we can get to begin to heal the fractures of the programmatic church. We need to rediscover our theology of the local

¹⁴³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 38.

church. We need to take an honest look at where we are failing our nuclear families and those in the congregation who are not connected to others. **We need to rediscover what it means to be a family of families.**¹⁴⁶ (emphasis added)

In short, Chap Clark is calling for a return to the original Puritan vision. We need to rediscover what it means to be a connectional, communicative, cooperative and cohesive family of families.

Pam Erwin writes of a conversation with a colleague who, like me, has had more than two decades of youth and family ministry experience. When asked what he believed to be the “biggest issue facing churches in their ministries to families,” he replied, “In most churches in America today, the ministries are detrimental to families. I call it ‘fragmentation of the family by design.’ ” His experience was that much of what we do in our churches, even when we call it family ministry, actually serves to disrupt, disconnect, and divide families.¹⁴⁷ Churches offer women’s ministries, children’s ministries, youth ministries, senior adult ministries, men’s ministries, and ministries centered around various personal needs such as divorce and recovery. Many of these ministries function as autonomous units within the context of the larger church body. One inherent problem with programs targeted at age and interest-segregated individuals is that they can counterproductively work to hinder, rather than encourage, healthy, intimate, cross-generational relationships in both the family and the church. Instead of bringing families together, our efforts to meet individual’s perceived needs may be unwittingly serving to pull families further apart. Erwin concludes, “The church must recall the new command Jesus gave his disciples: ‘Love one another’ (John 13:34). This is the essence of what it means to live as the church. When we allow ourselves to be

¹⁴⁶ Erwin, 5-6.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

swept up in thinking that the church is about programs, educational opportunities, musical and rhetorical entertainment, and appealing to every individual's tastes, we lose our main focus. Jesus called the church to be a family of families. Today the church more often resembles a corporation or a mall of specialty shops than a family.”¹⁴⁸

Again and again we hear in these excerpts a pleading call, at least in part, for restoration of the Puritan vision: the church as a Family of families. Too often church growth strategies overemphasize programs, techniques, campaigns, results and/or numbers and eclipse the church's real purpose: to be a mutually supportive community of faith where people of all ages, generations and interests are being connected to and loving others in the name of Jesus Christ. As the Puritans believed and generally practiced, this connection first takes place in the home, the First Church, but then it must spill over into mutually supportive relationships in the greater church. Intimacy in the church should be a natural, close, and real extension of intimacy in the Christian household.

Jack and Judith Balswick, in the conclusion of their book, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*, echo this seventeenth century New England Puritan theme in their presentation of the church's relational purpose: “The church, then, is to be a family to families, and a source of identity and support for isolated nuclear families. The church needs to become a community of faith ... [where it] must avoid the pitfall of exclusivity and the tendency to accept only certain types of people.”¹⁴⁹

Jesus called His disciples to a new form of intimacy, loyalty, and allegiance. His new commandment to “love one another as I have loved you” leaves little room for

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 14.

fellowship among relationally distant acquaintances and isolated individuals. The church is to be so much more than a gathering of individuals, a club of like-minded people, or even a worshipping congregation. The church is called to be an intimate family in which each member is equally loved and valued, taught and encouraged, fed and nurtured. “Church life and family life are closely interrelated in New Testament experience. The dynamic relationship between the two is so obvious that it appears to be taken for granted by the New Testament writers.”¹⁵⁶

Family ministry has a double focus: to care for, support, encourage and nurture families in the church; and to connect families and individuals together as a body in a way that enables authentic, biblical, family community to take place.¹⁵⁷ We need to work to provide a church atmosphere in which each individual can love and be loved, serve and be served, in mutually supportive relationships with others, as a family for the faithful. The church must be a family of families ... equipping, encouraging and promoting the primary ministry of the First Church of Home and Household. I remain convinced a key to genuine and lasting church re-formation, vitality and growth can be found in recovering this vision of family which was such an integral part of the grand spiritual heritage that founded this region and anchored this nation.

Conclusion

Several sources listed in the bibliography contain many practical suggestions and

¹⁴⁹ Jack and Judith Balswick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999), 304.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 26.

strategies for implementation of family-ministry principles which encourage and promote cross-generational relationships and faith nurture in the home, thus working to restore the Puritan vision of the family as the First Church, and the greater church as the “family of families.” The works of Pamela Erwin, Susan Hunt, Merton Strommon, Richard Hardel, Eric Wallace, Kerry Ptacek, Mark Devries, Ben Freudenburg and Gary McIntosh are most helpful in this regard, listing programming ideas and resources to foster adaptation and implementation of strategies to connect individuals, families and generations in a mutually supportive, nurturing and faith-enhancing manner that will serve to strengthen our families, our churches and our society.

Also included in an appendix is a congregational letter and five sermons presented to the congregation I serve in Warwick, Rhode Island, which may serve as examples of steps we are taking to encourage and recapture the Puritan vision. One of the advertised strengths of this congregation that first attracted my wife and me to consider this pastorate was its outstanding reputation in the area of children’s ministries. Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian, began as a response to wartime gasoline rationing during World War II. In 1942, women in this community organized an ecumenical, interdenominational Sunday School for area children whose families found it difficult to attend worship at their various churches due to the rationing. Worship services began later in that year, and on January 9, 1944 the church was officially born. The Sunday School had been a consistent strength of the church ever since.

When my family first arrived in December 1996, however, my wife and I could not help but notice, as outsiders coming in, that children were noticeably *absent* from the worshipping congregation. The church had two services of worship each Sunday; the

first service ran concurrently with the Sunday School (9:30-10:30); the second was 11:00. For the most part, parents dropped their children off at Sunday School, went to worship, and nearly everyone went home after the 10:30 coffee hour. On a typical Sunday, the 11:00 service had sparse attendance averaging between 40 and 50, while the 9:30 service would have two to three times that amount in attendance. Children were rarely, if ever, present at the 11:00 service, and relatively few Sunday School teachers attended. Whether intentional or not, family worship that included children of all ages was, frankly, discouraged.

As the weeks progressed, my wife and I also began to notice a rather large percentage of Greenwood's younger adults did not actively participate in the life and worship of the church once they'd completed Sunday School. It seemed there were whole generations of people missing from the pews each Sunday, including most of the adult sons and daughters of the church's long-term members and leadership, many of whom, we were to learn, resided in the area. However, this wasn't that surprising to us, as we now knew it was unlikely few, if any, of these missing adults had participated in worship *at all* during their Sunday School years.

The staff and session of the Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian has since taken small but significant measures to become a family-friendly church where family worship is encouraged and children are welcome, a "family of families" that encourages, promotes and fosters intergenerational communication and Christian discipleship in the homes, the "first Churches." The 1997 letter in the appendix highlights the first major formal step in that direction. I was pleased to note that recent

attendance surveys showed approximately one fourth of the congregation in attendance during a typical worship service were under the age of eighteen.

We've still a long, long way to go to fully recapture the Puritan vision; for one thing, so very few of our families function as "little churches" in their homes as the church continues to be the primary (and, for many, *sole*) source of faith education for them. Also, had the fourth criteria test for membership of the seventeenth century Puritans been imposed here, we may not have retained very many members, for like many of their regional counterparts in New England, most are not comfortable articulating matters of faith and are reticent to do so.¹⁵⁸ However, I remain optimistic and am encouraged that we are heading in the right direction as we seek to become a mutually-supportive, faith-enhancing "Familie of Families," a supportive ministry network of the First Churches of home and family.

Not only do I find great inspiration, encouragement and a model to emulate in the Puritan heritage of seventeenth century New England, I also find inspiration, encouragement and a model to emulate from another heritage originating from New England a century or so later. In his excellent book, *1776*, author David McCullough recounts the disdain with which the British first held the Continental Army assembled in New England, dismissing them as "peasantry," "a preposterous parade," "ragamuffins," or a "rabble in arms." For the most part, they were undisciplined, disorderly, had no flag or uniforms, were "wretchedly clothed," had little or no experience with military life, the arms they bore were "as various as their costumes", vastly under-equipped, and the great

¹⁵⁸ I refer the reader to Appendix B. In the written answers, most respondents chose to communicate matters of faith solely in somewhat generic terms of church involvement/attendance, denominational affiliation, and/or cultural identity, and *not* in personal terms of experiential spiritual encounter, heart

majority of the army were farmers or artisans, not soldiers. However, "... by and large they were good, solid citizens – as ‘worthy people as ever marched out of step,’ as would be said – married men with families who depended on them and with whom they tried to keep in contact as best they could.” McCullough continues:

It was the first American army and an army of everyone, men of every shape and size and makeup, different colors, different nationalities, different ways of talking, and all degrees of physical condition. Many were missing teeth or fingers, pitted by smallpox or scarred by past wars or the all-too-common hazards of life and toil in the eighteenth century. Some were not even men, but smooth-faced boys of fifteen or less.¹⁵⁹

The analogy isn't perfect, but had the members of the Continental Army been held to the exacting standards of the King's army, there might well have never been a Continental Army remaining at all, just as the too-exacting standards for Puritan church membership caused the ecclesiastical structure to shrink until it could no longer hold together. Those who made up the Continental Army were the ones, however, who answered the call to arms, and this ragtag assemblage went on to become the formidable force that took on the highly disciplined, experienced, and battle-hardened British redcoats and eventually prevailed.

For example, one of Warwick, Rhode Island's (my present location of service) native sons was Nathaniel Greene, a Quaker who was made general at age thirty-three after only six months of soldiering. A foundry man by trade, he had never set foot on a battlefield, suffered asthma, had a stiff right leg from a childhood accident resulting in a life-long limp, and under normal military criteria would have been disqualified from

commitment, or salvational/relational language as would be expected for those qualifying for church membership under the fourth criteria of seventeenth-century New England Puritanism.

¹⁵⁹ David McCullough, *1776*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 34

being an officer. However, Greene was to emerge from the war with a deserved reputation as George Washington's most gifted and dependable officer.

As McCullough expressed it, one of the salient leadership strengths of George Washington was his ability to see things as they were, not as he would wish them to be, and to labor and lead within the framework of that reality.¹⁶⁰ In spite of innumerable setbacks and many discouragements, he faithfully and doggedly served (and was served by), developed, worked with, made huge sacrifices for and successfully led this diverse assembly of people who had responded to the call to liberty. He helped them to never lose sight of the "goodness of our cause," built on their individual and corporate strengths while working to minimize their weaknesses, and went on to accomplish an outcome that bordered on the miraculous.

I believe the call for us in pastoral ministry is similar. May God grant us grace and wisdom to see things as they are, not as we wish they would be, and, empowered and guided by His spirit, may we labor and lead within the framework of that reality, using the blueprint of the Puritan vision for home, church and society as a model. May we do what we can to faithfully serve (and be served by), develop, work with, make sacrifices for and endeavor to lead this incredibly diverse assembly of people who have responded to the call of God (however uniquely they may choose to express their understanding of it) by their devotion and commitment to His church, and thus help enable them to enter into and enjoy the glorious family liberty of the children of God (Romans 8:21).

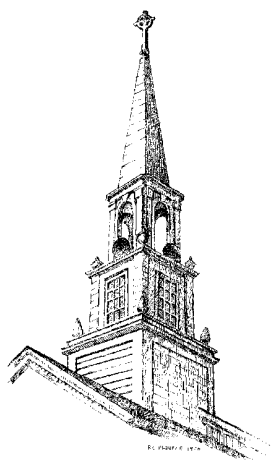
¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 40.

APPENDIX A

PASTORAL LETTER AND RELATED SERMONS

The pastoral letter and the five sermons in this appendix have been addressed to the congregation of the Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian of Warwick, Rhode Island, in order to help facilitate the development of a family-supportive ministry.

The letter was written about eight months after my arrival; the sermons were preached during the course of the research and development of this thesis.



Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian

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The Rev. Stephen L. Clark, Pastor

August 14, 1997

Dear Members and Friends of Greenwood Community Church,

By now, all of you should have received and read the June 20 letter from the Worship Committee announcing the upcoming changes in the Sunday morning worship and Sunday School schedule. The following schedule, effective September 7, was unanimously approved at the June 19 stated meeting of the Session:

8:00 - 9:00	First Service of Worship
9:15-10:15	Children's Sunday School
9:15 - 10:00	Adult Sunday School
10:00 - 10:30	Coffee (half) Hour
10:30 - 11:30	Second Service of Worship

I have long maintained that pastoral leadership needs to strike the delicate balance of **initiative** and **consensus**. Trained in theology and experienced in the business of the church's work and mission, the pastor has the duty to assert leadership, help initiate direction and impart vision. However, I have also long maintained that a foundational tenet of Christian faith and practice *and* a central tenet of Presbyterian polity is that we must make every effort to listen for the directive voice of Jesus Christ speaking through His collective Body, the members of the church. While realizing consensus does not always mean unanimity, I nevertheless seek as much agreement as possible on all matters facing the Session and/or congregation before proceeding, as I see no other Christ-honoring, practical way a congregation can make collective decisions. I have been most impressed by how the Session has conducted the church's business these past months since my arrival, and have every confidence the elders are sincerely trying to discern the directive voice of our Lord as they carry out their representational responsibilities of leadership in this congregation.

Those of you who have long been part of the body of Christ at Greenwood know there has been much discussion these past years regarding the Sunday morning schedule. From what I've (a) read in minutes, letters, and newsletters dating back the last two to three years and (b) heard from many individual members, I've learned that the Session exerted considerable time and energy as a Board and through its various committees trying to reach a consensus answer to

this question: “*How do we best accommodate the worship needs of our congregation?*” After much prayerful consideration, deliberation, discussion and fine-tuning of the “particulars”, the above schedule modifications were finally adopted.

The 10:30 Service of Worship will have the full choir, child care, and a structured “Children’s Church” activity period (*children up to and including second grade will be encouraged to participate for the first twenty minutes or so of worship, which will include a Time With the Children; they will then be dismissed to the Children’s Church activity period downstairs*). The 8:00 Service of Worship will be slightly less formal than the 10:30 service; in lieu of a choir, special music will be planned. The Children’s Sunday School hour remains relatively unchanged, and plans are underway for challenging, interesting, and stimulating biblical studies, topical courses and guest lecturers for the Adult Christian Education classes.

I know I speak on behalf of the Session as well as myself in saying that I fully understand this will cause inconvenience or difficulty for some, especially at first. However, I have every confidence that, in spite of the initial difficulties, making this rather momentous change will be in the long-term best interests of all, and **especially** in our children’s long-term best interests. On the next few pages I have attempted to list as thoroughly as possible the potential advantages of and/or reasons for these modifications.

As intimated in the Worship Committee’s letter, constructive input and feedback will be readily welcomed in the months ahead. There may be many adjustments needed as together we venture out on faith into this next “season of change;” thank you for your patience, understanding and cooperation. I am confident God is at work in all our lives and will continue to lead us in the direction we should go.

Sincerely,

Stephen L. Clark
Pastor

The following was included in the August 14, 1997 mailing:

POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF THE SUNDAY MORNING SCHEDULE CHANGE

- 1. There is great potential for increased availability of additional volunteers for the Sunday Church School.**

For whatever reasons, the 9:30 worship service has been traditionally perceived as the “main” worship service over the years, as attendance numbers averaged two to three times that of the 11:00 service. My understanding is that there are more than a few who might have considered volunteering their time and efforts in the Sunday School in years past, but did not want to miss the “main” 9:30 service.

- 2. There is great potential for increased participation in Adult Christian Education.**

Nearly **one hundred** adults participated in the Adult Christian Education classes planned for February 23, 1997, far surpassing attendance records of the past. Although this was in large part due to the excellent sessions led/taught by the Rev. Dr. Lloyd Dean, Dr. Elaine Magyar, and special guest Rev. Richard Merritt, an undeniably major factor was that the morning worship service did not run concurrently with the Church School hour. Due to the Service of Installation held that afternoon, there was only one service of worship that morning, which followed the Sunday Church School hour.

3. The entire choir will sing together each Sunday.

As we are planning to have special music for the 8:00 service (vocalists and/or instrumentalists), every 10:30 worship will have the services of the full choir. Also, as intimated above, all choir members will be better enabled to take part in the full range of Christian education programs, as participants or volunteers in teaching or the nursery. Finally, the need for special music at the early service will give additional opportunity for many individuals to offer their unique talents and abilities to God in worship.

4. The Sunday Church School's present timetable will remain relatively untouched.

The 9:15 starting time for the Sunday Church School has been "in place" for some time, and will remain as is with the new schedule; this should cause no disruption. Class *will* end fifteen minutes earlier than in the past; however, as parents/guardians should be already downstairs for the Coffee Hour (and not making their way through the sanctuary, down the stairs and around all the people in between), there should be little, if any, delay between the end of class and parents retrieving children.

5. The Church School hour can be utilized for special events presently being held between services, during the week and/or on Sunday evenings.

In order to cut down on evenings away from home, thus allowing families more time to be together, special events such as the New Members Orientation, Child Care Policy Training, Officer Training/Orientation, and the Presbyterian Women

seasonal Bible studies may be scheduled during this hour, if desired. Other special programs and/or guest speakers which would be of interest to all ages (*e.g., Sunday School pageants, mission presentations such as the Heifer Project, multi-media presentations*) may also be scheduled from time to time. Also, occasionally the need arises to have special meetings of the church boards (Session or Deacons) and/or any of the various committees on Sunday; in the past these have hurriedly taken place between worship services. Although such meetings should *never* take place on a regular basis, the option is open to meet during this hour.

6. An active, well-attended Adult Christian Education program can attract and avail itself of quality special guest lecturers.

At the time of this writing, we have secured commitments from three eminently qualified, internationally known, and wonderfully engaging speakers to be our guests this fall. We are still hammering out minor details regarding exact dates and times; you will be informed when we have done so.

7. The pastoral staff may fully participate in both Christian Education and Worship each Sunday.

I delighted in the opportunity to see the Sunday Church School “in action” February 23, which is something I could not do under the former schedule’s usual time restraints (*I can also count on one hand ... actually, on two fingers ... the number of times I have able to take part in the Coffee Hour the past nine months*). I was able to visit all the children’s and teen’s classes as well as attend portions of

the adult sessions that morning. As a pastor *and* as a father, I have an intense interest in and a loving concern for the children of our church; as much as is possible, I want to know them and I want them to know me. With this new schedule, I will be free to participate in all aspects of the Christian Education program; for that matter, so will our Director of Music. In like manner, the Director of Christian Education will be free to participate in all aspects of the worship service, as well. Brent Richards is eminently qualified as a worship leader, preacher, and “children’s sermon presenter;” he also has an excellent singing voice which might be a welcome addition to our choir and/or special music programs. I’d like to reiterate that, like many in the Greenwood Community Church, your pastoral staff believes very strongly and would like to show by personal example that participation in the worship of God and quality Christian education are *equally* important, for *all* ages.

With that said, I’d like to now state what many believe to be the most important long-term advantage of the change:

8. Our children will be invited and encouraged to participate weekly in the worship of God.

Author and lecturer Dr. John Westerhoff has stated that “...one of the main reasons the church is losing its young people is that education and worship are so totally separate. When young people attend worship, it is too much of a ‘foreign’ environment and many cannot make the transition from the lively atmosphere of their education programs to the formality of adult worship.” (“Linking Worship and Education,” Logos Productions Inc., Volume 3, #3, 1997) I’m sure Dr.

Westerhoff includes in that category those children who have been “brought up” in the Sunday School but never assimilated into the church after graduation. To be sure, the causes are many and varied, but the truth remains that an unfortunately large percentage of Greenwood’s children do not actively participate in the life and worship of the church once they’ve “completed” Sunday School and confirmation. Whereas this is a problem in many churches today, I could not help but notice, as an “outsider” coming in, that it seems *especially* true in our congregation. With an enrollment of approximately one hundred students year after year, and the consistently active participation of numerous talented, qualified and dedicated teachers and staff, the excellent reputation the Greenwood Christian Education program has in our community and our Presbytery is well deserved. However, the somewhat paradoxical reality is that a disappointingly small percentage of students remain active in the life of the church upon graduation. Might one reason be that a disappointingly small percentage of students actively participate in the worship services *while enrolled in the Sunday School*, which we might have unintentionally but subtly encouraged with the former schedule?

Again, the causes may be many and varied, but I and many others believe the first step to addressing this pressing and enduring concern is to invite and encourage our children to get into the habit of regular participation in worship. We are taking steps to make the worship service more “family-friendly;” we plan to have *A Time With The Children* each 10:30 service, followed by a structured *Children’s Church/Activity* time

for children up to and including second grade. The first 15-20 minutes of worship during which the young children will be present is normally somewhat “active” (*rising* for the Call to Worship and opening hymn, *sitting* for the unison prayer, *rising* for the Gloria Patri and the Passing of the Peace, and *coming forward* for the Time With The Children), so the amount of time a small child will have to “*Sit still and be quiet!*” (to quote many a harried parent) is relatively small. Worship does involve some “learned behaviors,” and if children are unaccustomed to the dynamics, things might be a bit difficult at first. However, I believe, and believe strongly, that we do our children a severe disservice if we do not give them the opportunity to learn as soon as they are able. I also think we might be surprised at how quickly they will adapt and by how much they may absorb!

Those present in worship last Father’s Day may remember my saying that I am at times perplexed by how casually some Christian parents take their responsibility for the spiritual life of their children. There are parents in our churches today who would not dream of letting their children miss a two-hour football, baseball or soccer practice/game who feel no such responsibility toward having them in church and Sunday School each week. They might reason, “*Oh, they just get bored and ‘antsy’, they don’t learn much in church anyway.*” On one hand, that might be true. On the other hand, they learn quite a bit ... if nothing else, they learn by your example and effort to have them there that **God is important!** The issue is not how effective or engaging or entertaining worship and Sunday School might be, the question is this: *Is God important or not?* The most important, life-enhancing thing we can teach our children is to put God first in their lives. If we are not teaching them that, by word and example, then we are robbing our children

of something very, very valuable and precious. Let's make every effort to make worship of God a priority in our lives and the lives of our families.

The following sermon was delivered Father's Day, 2003:

A Father's Touch

In Mark 5:21-42, we have the story of Jairus, the leader of the local synagogue, who was also the father of a very sick little girl. We are told his daughter was dying, so Jairus went out to find Jesus. When he does find Him he throws himself at Jesus' feet, pleading earnestly for Jesus to follow him to his home. Jesus agreed to go, and a large parade of people followed them to the synagogue leader's home. The "parade" was interrupted by the healing encounter with a woman who had been suffering for twelve years, which we studied our last time together. We read that while Jesus was still speaking to the now-healed woman, some men came from Jairus' house to tell him his daughter had died.

Surely people are thinking Jesus had missed His big moment; He had missed his opportunity. He had this invitation to do something big for an important community leader, but He had delayed too long in paying attention to this unnamed woman. We are then told, "... *ignoring what they said, Jesus told Jairus, 'Don't be afraid, just believe (5:36).* ' " Jesus then dismissed the crowd, taking only Peter, James, John and Jairus with Him. They go to the home, and find that the professional mourners have already gathered. Jairus' friends, his subordinates, and his social peers are most likely all there, as well. There's much commotion; there are people crying and wailing loudly. Jesus says to the mourning crowd, "*Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead, but asleep. (5:39)*"

We can imagine the awkward response. First there's the stunned, awkward silence, which usually follows in the wake of someone saying something inappropriate at

a time like this. Then the muttering, and the snickering — can't you just hear the murmuring begin, growing into outright scornful laughter? We are told that they laughed at Jesus, but certainly some of that laughter is directed at Jairus. From their perspective, Jairus has apparently been taken in by this traveling faith healer, this charlatan. Also, you should know that the synagogue in Galilee — Jairus' synagogue — had already taken a public position on Jesus, officially labeling Him a false Messiah.

How can Jairus hope to remain a respected leader when he seems to pin his hopes on this censured fellow who doesn't seem to even know a dead body when he sees one? Jairus stands to lose face. He stands to lose respect and credibility in the community, and he risks losing even his livelihood, by bringing Jesus into his home.

But while they are all laughing, Jesus took charge. He put them all out; He just shooed everyone out of the home except for the parents, Peter, James and John. He then went in to where the little girl was, took her by the hand and raised her from her deathbed.

On this Father's Day, there are three things to note about father Jairus, three things I'm sure his little girl noticed. (1) His daughter saw that he took the initiative and assumed the responsibility of seeking out Jesus and bringing Him to her. (2) She also noticed Dad was not ashamed to bring Jesus into his home, and that he allowed Jesus to take charge of his home. (3) She couldn't help but notice her father loved her, because it was clear he wanted her to live and be well, and he was determined to do whatever it took to make that happen.

First, this daughter saw that her father took the initiative to seek out Jesus. Note that he sought out Jesus — he did not send his wife, he did not send the nanny, he did not

send the grandparents, he did not send any of his subordinate servants, nor did he just drop his daughter off with the followers of Jesus and then go out for coffee at Dunkin' Donuts while they "fixed" her. This conscientious and concerned father set the priority and assumed the responsibility of seeking out Jesus *himself*, and then bringing Jesus to his child.

In my thesis research on the New England Puritans, I'm constantly impressed by the seriousness with which fathers took on all their responsibilities, but particularly this one. They took charge of bringing Jesus to their children. As one historian rather bluntly expressed it, they didn't sit around on their blessed assurances and let someone else take care of the spiritual nurture of their offspring. I've learned the Puritans who settled New England were intensely purposeful, intensely intellectual, and intensely reverent. They believed their life mattered, they were determined to live it to the full, and they believed intensely that what they were engaged in doing was more important than anything else in the world. Part of that conviction is the Puritans saw the family as the basic unit of society; but more importantly, they saw the family first as a little church in itself. The *family* was the First Church. As there must be order in the church, so there must be order in the family, and, for the Puritans, that order was clearly defined in Scripture.

In a 1699 treatise entitled "A Family Well-Ordered," Cotton Mather wrote that families are "*...the nurseries of our societies. When families are under an ill discipline, all other societies will be ill-disciplined as a result, [they] will [all] feel the error of that first concoction.*" For Mather and the Puritans, the family was the foundation, the basic building block, of a healthy society. They believed that the Heavenly Father delegated to earthly parents, and especially to fathers, the primary responsibility to teach children

about God. It was not primarily the mother's job, nor was it primarily the job of the church. Again, for the Puritan, the family was the first church. It was the Puritan father/pastor's responsibility to teach and catechise the children, to ensure that the family was in attendance at worship each Sunday, to examine the whole family after each sermon to see how much they understood or retained, and generally to set an example of godliness at all times and in all matters. These tough, rugged, backboned Puritans, who took the huge risks of uprooting their lives and crossing an ocean to carve a civilization out of a daunting wilderness, did so because they wanted their children to be well. Like Jairus, they wanted their children to live. Like Jairus, they were willing to do whatever it took to do so. And like Jairus, Puritan fathers assumed the fatherly responsibility of bringing Jesus to their children.

When the father refuses to do his job of bringing Jesus to his children, mothers and grandparents and churches have to take on more responsibility for doing so; however, studies and experience show this is less than ideal. One study of church attendance I cited on Father's Day 1997 (*unfortunately, I only saved the clipping and I can no longer cite the source; it was obtained from an American Baptist Sunday School quarterly magazine in 1985*) showed that if both parents attended church regularly, over **72%** of their children remained faithful to the church as adults. If only Mom attended regularly, that percentage dropped to less than **15%** — and, if memory serves, **13%** of that 15% were daughters. When fathers teach their children to honor God, when fathers are intent on loving righteousness and turning away from evil, when fathers live consciously in the presence of God, when fathers love their wives and honor their commitments, when fathers do all these things and teach their children by word and example to do all these

things — in a word, when fathers bring Jesus to their children — their children will be much, much better for it. Their daughters and their sons will be well; they will live. And more than likely, they will follow in their father's faithful footsteps. So, number one, the first thing Jairus' daughter noticed was her loving father assumed the fatherly responsibility of seeking Jesus Christ himself and bringing Jesus to his children.

The second thing Jairus' daughter noticed: Her father did not hesitate to bring Jesus Christ into their home. Remember, Jairus is a leader of the synagogue, which had already taken a public position on Jesus, calling him a false Messiah. The last thing Jairus ought to be doing is inviting Jesus and the entire local crowd to his home for a healing service! He is taking a huge risk. He doesn't care about the risk, if it means his child will have a chance to live, really live. He wants his daughter to be well.

As already noted, when Jesus entered Jairus' home, He encountered all kinds of people there. Note Jesus is the One Who chose who was to stay, and who was to go. Jairus, as a good father — like a Puritan father might do — allowed Jesus to have that authority. Jairus not only brought Jesus into his home, but he also understood that if his child was to be well, he would have to allow Jesus to *take over* his home. So he brings Jesus to the house, and he gives Jesus charge of that house.

And I believe this with all my heart: The only way our children will live, and live well, is if we bring Jesus Christ into our homes, and permit Him to take charge of our homes. Jesus ran out those who did not belong, those who would hinder what He intended to do in that home. He drove out those elements in that home that mocked and scorned Him. Jairus allowed Jesus the authority to bring into that home who or what

Jesus desired, and he allowed Him the authority to remove those people and things that would hinder His ministry of life and healing in that home.

Is there anything in our homes that will hinder the ministry of Jesus Christ to our families? If you want your children to be well, pray God will show it to you, and allow Jesus Christ to run it out of your house. Part of responsible fatherhood is just keeping people and things out of our houses that will harm our children, including all influences that might hinder the healing, life-giving work of Jesus Christ.

So, Jairus' daughter observed her father (1) assumed the fatherly responsibility of bringing Jesus to his offspring, (2) brought Jesus to his home and gave Him charge over it, and finally, (3) he did all this out of love for her. It was clear he wanted her to live, he wanted her to be well, and he was willing to do whatever it took to do so. We don't know how long she lived, but I don't believe a day went by that this daughter didn't think, *"I'm alive today because of my Dad's love for me."*

Perhaps Jairus' daughter married and had children of her own. Perhaps Jairus' grandchildren heard the story again and again of how Grandpa once put his reputation on the line by seeking out Jesus, bringing Jesus into the home, by giving Jesus charge of the home, and how as a result their mother was given life — all because her Dad loved her enough to assume the fatherly responsibility of bringing Jesus Christ to her.

The following was delivered the Second Sunday of Advent, 2005:

A Family Holiday

My guess is with just one word, I can make your heart beat faster, especially during the holidays. When some of you hear this word, your heart will quicken because it will be made warm. When others of you hear this exact same word, your heart will quicken because it will be made anxious. That word is ... FAMILY.

- Those of you who are about to be reunited or who have already been reunited with family for a time of holiday, and think that is wonderful news, are already getting even more excited about it. *“I’m going home!” “The kids are coming back!” “My family is coming together, it’ll be wonderful!”*
- Others of you are thinking, *“Oh, gosh, that’s right. Family. Aggh, they’re coming back!” “My family is coming together; it’ll be terrible!”*
- Or, maybe for you, there is no family, and this season is a time of intense loneliness.
- Or, maybe a member of the family is not with you who was with you last year, so the joy of the season is tempered with an intense grief.
- And I know some of you are in families experiencing strife or separation.

So, some of us might just like to ignore the whole family part of Christmas, but, of course, you can’t do that. In fact, So, some of us might just like to ignore the whole family part of Christmas, but you know, you just can’t do that. In fact, I would say you can’t even understand Christmas apart from family, because it is a FAMILY holiday.

Now, it is not necessarily a family holiday in the sense you may be thinking. I am not saying you have to have a family, or have to even like your family, to understand Christmas. No, Christmas is not about your mother or father or brothers or sisters or children, not ultimately. Christmas is about the Holy family. And I don't mean Mary and Joseph ... they are secondary characters, really. I mean the holy Family of Father, Son and Spirit. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the true acting agents in this story. They are the original family unit whose redemptive activity makes it possible for any of us to be a member of their Family. The Christmas story has often been told through the eyes of Mary and Joseph and the great disruption in their lives, which is an accepted and good way to look at this text, but we must not allow them to obscure the primary actors of Christmas, the real Holy Family, who are Father, Son and Spirit.

One way the Trinity can be understood is in the light of relationships. Each member of the Trinity — Father, Son, and Spirit — enjoys an intimate, eternal, extensive relationship. They are always relating, always in communion. In this trinity of relationships, each of the three Persons maintains their own unique identity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit co-exist in a perfect, complete community, a “whole” Family, a Holy Family. As Augustine expressed it, the Holy Family is the *Lover* (God), the *Beloved* (Jesus) and the *Love* (the Holy Spirit). The Holy Family isn't a dysfunctional family, it isn't a needy family; it is a complete and wholly functional unit. The triune God isn't lonely, He doesn't need company or help, God doesn't need anything. The triune God enjoys a divine community that is complete and lacking in nothing. But out of the perfect love this Trinitarian “Family” enjoyed came the gracious decision to *extend*

their family, to *expand* their circle of love ... so God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, went out to find and prepare a Bride for His Son. This is where the Church comes in.

The grand wonder of our salvation is that we are “married into” this eternal triune Family, this relationship, so the Trinity now consists of Father, Son, Holy Spirit ... and all those (including us) who have said “Yes” to the Trinitarian proposal over the millennia. This is the *communion* of saints. We are all part of the Church, the Bride and Body of Christ. Romans 5:5 says, “*God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.*” Again, the Trinity is the Lover, the Beloved and the Love. God the Lover loves the Son, the Beloved. As we are in covenant relationship with Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit takes what is the Son’s and gives it to us, pours it into us, so much so that we become the Beloved ... in Christ. In fact, as Jesus reiterates in John 16, one of the Holy Spirit’s main functions is to take what rightfully belongs to the Beloved, and make it known to His disciples, thus making us heirs of grace and part of the Holy Trinitarian Family.

With that said, I’d like to pose a question. What is my common ground with anybody else in the local church? For that matter, what is my common ground with anyone else in this town, in this state, or on this planet? What is my common ground with believer or unbeliever, Democrat or Republican, native-born or foreign, Catholic, Baptist, Jew ... what is my common ground with anyone? The answer is the fact that everybody ... every single person ... is made in the image of God. And because we are made in the image of God, there are things that are true of everybody.

What’s true of all of us is we are *designed to respond to God*. Though we may, as Romans 1 tells us, suppress the truth in unrighteousness, our hearts yearn for, and were

designed to yearn for, the Creator Who made us. What's true of all of us is we were designed to understand and to know the concept of a family, more particularly, of a parent, and even *more* to the point, we were designed to understand and know the concept of a Father. There may be many battles to be fought, many issues to be discussed, many things for people to wrangle and disagree over, but as you travel around the world and engage any given person in conversation at any time, I guarantee that you start talking to them about their father ... or their mother, or their children ... and they will well up with passion! "*Oh, my father!*" or "*Oh ... my father.*" "*O, my children!*" Or, "*Oh ... my children.*" Anyone — an atheist, a communist, a hedonist, a Buddhist, a Maoist, a Taoist or a HowNowBrownCow-ist — anyone and everyone cares passionately at some level about the relationships which are found in the context of the family.

Because of that, people yearn for family relationships that work. From the depths of our souls, what we want perhaps more than anything else is for family relationships that work better than they are working now. I'm convinced that is something true for all people of all times and all places. Where does that yearning come from? At the core of this yearning is that we are separated from a God who is our Father, and our sin has created a gulf, a rift, a chasm between us. The true essence of the common ground that we have with anyone else on this planet is found in the fact that we are sons and daughters made in the image of God Who is our Father; we are children who inwardly yearn for a better relationship with our Dad.

This is the story of all humanity. It is the story of all history, and it is the story for a reason. It is the way God has designed the world, it is the way God has designed you, it is the way God has structured the universe — that we are children who have been

designed to respond to a Father. However, we have a generation of people today who do not know how to relate to God because we do not know how to relate to our fathers.

The Puritans who settled New England believed passionately God chose the family as the primary organization to teach spiritual realities. They also believed passionately that the family was the primary building block of a functioning society. It is the first and basic earthly building block upon which all other earthly institutions will experience blessing and success. For the state to experience blessing, our Puritan founders openly proclaimed you must have godly, moral people, and godly, moral people come from godly, moral families. Yes, moral people can come out of broken and dysfunctional families as well, but it is so much more difficult. The family must be strong.

The Puritans who settled New England were intensely purposeful, intensely intellectual, intensely reverent — they believed intensely what they were engaged in doing was more important than anything else in the world. They believed their life mattered, they wanted to live it to the full, but not just for themselves — *and this is important to note* — they did not have a “Me Generation” mentality of wanting to “grab all the gusto” in life just for themselves. No, they had a Multi-generational mentality, a multi-generational view of their world. They were living fully in the present with an eye to the future, patiently working and building and hacking a civilization out of the wilderness not only for themselves, but for their children and their children’s children, working cooperatively with God to provide for a future filled with hope.

We live in a time when people are not future-oriented. Too, too many of us live only for the moment. Too often we give little thought or care for the next generation.

We are prone to think little of how our manner of living today will influence future generations, how it will affect our children and our grandchildren. What we do matters; what we do here and now does have an effect far beyond what we can even imagine. You've all seen the bumper stickers on the back of those \$200K motor homes: "*WE ARE SPENDING OUR CHILDREN'S INHERITANCE.*" Well, we can squander our children's potential inheritance in more ways than just spending all our money. The root word from which we get the word "Wealth" is the old English word "weal." I'm told that "Weal" originally meant strength, power, substance of character. "Wealth" was seen as a tangible sign of one's strength of soul, one's strength of character, and so on. The Puritans invested heavily in this kind of intangible "capital," and it paid huge dividends in godly legacies.

One thing I'm increasingly aware of, both as I age and as I continue to be a parent, is that what I am doing now, how I am living now, will affect my family for generations to come. That is both exhilarating and frightening! Generations! Do we really understand that? This is true for every single person in this room! Our individual lives are not just about "us." The fact that our lives have a multigenerational impact for good or ill is inescapable, and that applies whether you have children or not ... for example, all in this congregation have pledged repeatedly at baptisms to be "family" to the children in our midst. Our lives all have a multigenerational impact on those around us and on their progeny for years and years and years to come.

I'd like to read from Deuteronomy 5, verses 8-10. God is speaking, and He says: "*You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of*

the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Do you see the potential impact of your life? In His great mercy, God shows love, He shows mercy, unto a *thousand* ... of what, people? No! A *thousand generations!* He shows love to a *thousand generations* of those who love Him and keep His commandments. Generation after generation after generation after generation will reap the benefit of your godly behavior! That’s the big-picture Puritan vision; it is a biblical vision for *multigenerational* faithfulness. We need to recapture that.

The Puritans saw the family as the basic unit of society; but more importantly, they saw the family first and foremost as a little church in itself. Cotton Mather wrote that families are “...*the nurseries of our societies. When families are under an ill discipline, all other societies will be ill-disciplined as a result, [they] will [all] feel the error of that first concoction.*” Throughout the Bible, family life and relationships again and again provide the biblical types through which God communicates heavenly realities. The Bible begins with a family, it is full of family stories in between, and the Bible ends with a Family coming together in the consummate marriage feast of the Lamb. That’s when the Bride (the Church) and the Groom (Christ) fully come together, united for all eternity, of which this Table in the chancel is a sign and promise. See this communion table as a symbol and pledge of that grand Head Table in the ultimate Wedding Reception, where we will raise the Cup of blessing to propose a toast for an eternity of bliss for the Bride and Groom! That’ll be the ultimate Communion of saints.

Notice how the Old Testament closes — the last verse in Malachi (4:6) communicates/prophesies what will be the epitome of redemption: “*He will turn the*

hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.”

This filial turning of the heart is the starting point of true revival, revival which culminates in our being fully reunited with our Father.

When we talk about the Christmas story these next weeks, know that this is the story about your true Family who is coming together at Christmas. Again, at the core of this universal yearning deep in the human heart is that we are separated from a God who is our Father. The true essence of the common ground we have with anyone else on this planet is found in the fact that we are sons and daughters made in the image of this God, and we yearn for a right relationship with our Dad. The apostle John tells us in John 1:12 that to all who receive this “Word made flesh,” all who call on and believe in His name, He gives the right to be called the children of God — and so we are adopted, brought back into this family — Reunited with our Father.

Christmas — yes, it is a Family holiday.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Portions of this sermon were gleaned from digital audio recordings of Vision Forum’s “Church and Family Unity Series:” William O. Einwechter, “A Biblical Vision for Multi-Generational Faithfulness” and Douglas W. Phillips, “The Big Picture” (San Antonio, TX, Vision Forum Ministries).

The following was delivered July 18, 2004 on Vacation Bible School Sunday:

Teach Your Children

Some of you from my generation may have read the sermon title and feared I was going to get my un-tuned guitar out one more time. “Teach your Children” was a Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young hit (many) years ago, which I am not going to sing for you at this time. You may remember some of the lyrics: *“You, who are on the road, must have a code that you can live by. And so, become yourself, because the past is just a goodbye. Don’t you ever ask them why. If they told you, you will cry. So just look at them and sigh, and know they love you.”* So much of what this church is about is teaching children. And that is a good thing, for children are the ones to whom we are responsible for the future. Now, whether you have children or not, or whether your children are young or all grown up, frankly, is beside the point. This is not a sermon about families, nor is it a sermon about parenting. This is a sermon about a generation of children growing up to have a code to live by, a generation of children growing up to know and love God. In the family of God, **every one** of you plays a role in that. It doesn’t matter whether you are married or single, it doesn’t matter whether you are young or old ... by virtue of your promises at baptism, the responsibility of raising the kids of this church belongs to you.

All of you.

Let us pray. *Do, O Lord help us in these moments to understand what it is to have the responsibility to bind your love to the hearts of our future. Renew in us that love that we might have it to pass on. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

The book of Deuteronomy was Moses' farewell address to the people he loved and cared about, people he had been "on the road" with for some forty years. They were about now to leave the wilderness road and pass on into a promised land, but Moses knew he wouldn't go with them. These are his final words to them ... words he no doubt chose quite carefully, for these words would have to carry the people further into the future than Moses himself could.

Try to imagine Moses pulling out a guitar and singing, *"You who are on the road must have a code that you can live by."* But what he wouldn't go on to sing would be *"And so, become yourself, because the past is just a goodbye. Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you will cry. So just look at them and sigh, and know they love you."* Moses wanted to give them a much more substantial code to live by than that of their own limited human perspective. He wanted parents to be able to do so much more than to just look at their children and "sigh," never to question "why" they do or say certain things, and just hope for the best. Moses wanted the children of Israel to live joyfully, well, responsibly and forever! Knowing he couldn't go with those children into their future, he wanted to say and do what he could to give them the best, and really, only, code there is to live well by.

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses comes to his main point: *"Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only God, and you shall love the Lord with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your might. Bind his words to your heart! You shall teach these words diligently to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you work. Bind them as a sign on your hand and your forehead. Put them on your doorposts and your gates."* In other words,

make sure as your children come and go that they are constantly and continually confronted with your conversation about God and His good commandments, in order that it may go well for you and your future for years to come. As Moses knew, there is no more important investment for the future well being of the community than the investment we make in our children. That's true for the community at large and it is true for the religious community. It does not matter how well we provide for the church's future with solid finances or beautiful, well-kept facilities. If the children of our church do not grow up to know and love God, it will all become useless if they someday drift away from our houses of worship and from the only code worth living by.

How do we fulfill such an incredible responsibility? Some of us don't even have children. Others have children who are long gone. Some of us are never going to have kids. How do we bind the love of God to the hearts of this next generation? How can we do that? If nothing else, we make every effort to give them a code to live by, by exercising a wonderful, biblical gift called **tradition**. Tradition is a means of rehearsing central truths and values, and in the process of that, inculcating those truths and values. What tradition is not is a desperate clinging to the past. Biblical tradition is about living in the present and facing the future with timeless truths and unchanging values. Biblical tradition is a *progressive* force that allows us to encounter a changing world, but with a certain sense of history and identity and a very particular interpretation of life. Thus the tradition allows us to know and rehearse *who we are* in a world that will tell us so many different things. This particular passage in Deuteronomy was so central, so foundational to the Hebrews because they in fact faced one changing environment after the next. Eventually Jewish families began to recite these words in their homes every morning and

every night; it's called the "Shema." Twice a day, every day, the family would gather and to rehearse the words, *"Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."* Twice a day, every day, every home. Some did it three times a day. Now don't you think some Jewish children rolled their eyes and said, *"Ugh. Not again, Dad. This is so-oo dumb. My Gentile friends don't have to do this. Why do we have to do this twice a day?"* Not unlike some protests some parents hear from the back seat as they take (or sometimes drag) kids to worship week after week: *"Ugh. Not again, Dad. Why do we have to go there, again? My school friends don't have to do this."* It may not make sense to them when we snap back, *"Because we are seeking to bind the knowledge and love of God to your hearts, so be quiet!"*, but that is largely what it's all about.

The fact of the matter is when our children are free to leave behind our traditions, they just may. They may leave them ... for a while. But when life gets hard ... and life will get hard... they will be able to return to the knowledge and love of God if we in the family of God have gone to the trouble of trying to bind it to their hearts. What is heartbreaking is that so many today have grown up with no tradition. They have grown up having received nothing of value. These are people who grow up in value neutral environments, and do not even have values worth rebelling against. There's just nothing there! They are not in rebellion from the church, nor are they in rebellion from religion, at least not consciously. There was nothing bound to their hearts to rebel against; no one bothered to give it to them.

You know these people ... of course you do. We work beside people like this; some of you live with people like this. They are lost. They do not know who they are.

It's a sad thing, because they are growing up as confused people as they are bombarded by countless conflicting voices telling them who they should be. Kids today are just inundated with conflicting messages about who they are or who they should aspire to be. There are so, so many interpretations of life given to our children. The coach has one, so does the peer group. Nike has one; so does MTV. The list of conflicting voices is countless. Unless young people can learn early on who they are, unless they can grow up knowing who they are in Jesus Christ, unless they get that message bound to their hearts to know and love God and His good law, it will only get harder in life.

That's why we come back to church Sunday after Sunday, sit in these pews, and go through the traditions one more time. Every worship service begins as we come into God's presence, and bow in adoration. We then confess who we are, telling the truth of our sin in the prayer of confession. When we are then assured of our pardon in Jesus Christ, which is such good news we just have to jump to our feet and sing glory to God. We then pass the joy and peace that Christ has given us around to our neighbors. Having consciously come into God's presence, having told the truth about who we are, having celebrated our peace in Christ, we can then hear the truth of God's word in song and reading and preaching and ministered in the sacraments, and all of these traditions are just different ways of saying again and again, "The Lord your God is one, the only one. And you just got to love Him with all your heart, and soul, and might." And we leave worship thinking, "That's right. That's right. Now I remember who I am." As one new member wrote to me just a week or so ago: "Please let me take this opportunity to express my most heartfelt joy and happiness attending GCCP services gives me. Each Sunday, I walk out the front doors feeling new, rejuvenated, reborn, re-energized and just

plain good about the world and myself.” *That’s* our tradition. That’s the gift we want to give to our children here. We want to teach them how to rehearse an identity. They need that, because the world will pull them apart into a million small pieces unless they are sure about who they are, rooted in the knowledge and love of God. We want them to change a hostile world, rather than being changed by it.

That’s why Sunday after Sunday young mothers hold little fingers and move them across the words of the hymns. That’s why mothers, fathers, grandmothers, young adults and high school students take time out of their summer holiday to make a fake campground out of the church, or why other adults stay up Saturday nights finishing Sunday School lessons, so our kids can grow up knowing this Book. That’s why youth leaders and elders give themselves as friends to the teenagers of this church who cannot believe what they cannot see modeled in someone’s life. But let me be clear about our limitations. We can teach and rehearse the traditions, but only God can give faith. Only the Holy Spirit can open the heart to what we are seeking to bind there. Faith that believes, really believes, that in Jesus Christ, you have been found by a gracious God Who is just determined to love you and give you His best.

The real question is not, “How do we make our kids believe that?” The important question is “Do we believe that?” If nothing else, are our children at least growing up believing that we believe? Do they hear you talking about your love of God while you are at home and when you are away? When you lie down and when you rise?

If we are concerned about the faith of the next generation, we may do best to nurture it in our selves. Because I assure you the future is watching you, all of you, closer than you know.

The following was delivered July 18, 2006 on Vacation Bible School Sunday:

A Strategy for Church Growth

As you can see from the children's obvious enthusiasm, it's been an exciting, fun, enjoyable and wonderful week of Vacation Bible School. Thank you to all who brought your children here this week, and a special thank you to all who did so much to make this ministry go so well, especially the tireless and ever-creative Mrs. David who's labored many, many hours to pull this all together. This Vacation Bible School Sunday is as good a time as any to reiterate why we do this, and why this church believes ministry to families and children is so, so important.

In 1988, Princeton Seminary president Thomas Gillespie addressed the 200th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) with these words: "The truth of the matter is that the chief cause of our membership decline is our inability over the past quarter of a century to translate our faith to our children. Put simply, we are unable to keep our children in the church. As a result, we are not only a dwindling church but an aging church as well."

One pastor writes of his experience attending a church growth conference: "Listed as topics for possible consideration were more than a dozen subjects bearing on ways and means to enlarge the church. *Conspicuous by its absence* was any mention of anything having to do with the birth and subsequent nurture of the church's children, even though it is easy to prove that since the church's beginning this has been the primary instrument of her growth. Furthermore, this is the biblical norm. One of the primary features of the covenant the Lord established with his people is that it embraces families and has always in view the continuation of its saving blessing for generations to come."

Let me re-read the words of Psalm 78:-

We will not hide these things from our children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds, but would keep his commands."

And from Deuteronomy 6:

"Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only God, and you shall love the Lord with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your might. Bind his words to your heart! You shall teach these words diligently to your children. **Talk about them when you are at home** and when you are away, when you lie down and when you work. Bind them as a sign on your hand and your forehead. Put them on your doorposts and your gates."

In short, make sure that when your children are coming, going, lying down or standing up, they are constantly hearing the words of God. Are we doing that?

In their book, Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry, authors Merton Strommen and Richard Hardel write:

Why are churches losing their children? **Because the tradition of passing on the faith in the home is disappearing for many members of Protestant and Catholic congregations.** A study conducted in 1980, called "Young Adolescents and Their Parents," involved a national random sample of eight thousand adolescents whose parents were members of congregations in eleven different Protestant and Catholic denominations. The study showed that "God, the Bible, or religious things" are seldom discussed in church homes. Only 10 percent of church families discuss its faith with any degree of regularity; in 43 percent of the homes in these denominations, faith is never discussed. A similar study conducted in 1986 involved 7,551 students from 196 randomly selected Catholic schools. When asked how often their family talks about religious things, only 17 percent of the students claimed to discuss such topics at least once a week. In 1990 a national sample of youth and adults from six major Protestant denominations was asked the same question. Their response was no better: 35 percent of the youth, ages sixteen to eighteen, said they rarely if ever talked about faith or God with their mother, and 56 percent reported not *ever* having such discussions with their father. As is

obvious from these percentages, faith sharing is not happening today in most families of the church.¹⁶²

In his latest book, Transforming Your Children Into Spiritual Champions, George Barna cited nationwide research conducted from 2001-2003 showing a person's lifelong behaviors and views are generally developed when they are very young, even before they reach the teenage years. His research displayed four critical outcomes:

First, a person's moral foundations are generally in place by the time they reach age 9. While those foundations are refined and the application of those foundations may shift to some extent as the person ages, the fundamental perspectives on truth, integrity, meaning, justice, morality, and ethics are formed quite early in life. After their first decade, most people simply refine their views as they age without a wholesale change in those leanings.

Second, a person's response to the meaning and personal value of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection is usually determined long before a person reaches eighteen. In fact, a majority of Americans surveyed made a lasting determination about the personal significance of such things before the age of twelve.

Third, Barna showed data indicating that in most cases people's spiritual beliefs are irrevocably formed when they are pre-teens. Upon comparing data from a national survey of thirteen-year-olds with an identical survey among adults, Barna found the belief profile related to a dozen central spiritual principles was identical between the two groups. "*In essence*," Barna noted, "*what you believe by the time you are thirteen is what you will die believing*." Of course, there are many individuals who go through life-changing experiences in which their beliefs are altered or even changed completely.

¹⁶² Merton P. Strommen and Richard A. Hardel, Passing On The Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth

However, these are the notable exceptions to the usual norm. According to the research, most people's minds are made up and they believe they know what they need to know spiritually by age 13 (!). Their main focus in absorbing religious teaching after that age is to gain reassurance and confirmation of their existing beliefs rather than to glean new insights that will redefine their foundations."

Fourth and finally, the research revealed adult church leaders usually have serious involvement in church life and training when they are young. Statistics gathered from among a national sample of pastors, church staff and lay leaders showed more than four out of five of those leaders had consistently been involved in a ministry to children for an extended period of years prior to age thirteen. One implication is that the ones who will be the church's leaders two decades from now are probably active participants in our children's ministries today.

Barna concluded that the outcome of his studies produced a significant turnabout in his own views about ministry. "Since I became a Christian twenty years ago, I have always accepted the dominant notion: the most important ministry is that conducted among adults. But the overwhelming evidence we have seen of the huge impact in the lives of kids and the relatively limited changes in the lives of adults has completely revolutionized my view of ministry. I have concluded that children are the single most important population group for the Church to focus upon. Many churches may not go that far, but I do hope they will at least consider the research findings and place a greater emphasis upon children. Such a shift in priorities could well bring about the spiritual renaissance that many church leaders have long been praying for."

Susan Hunt, a consultant for the Presbyterian Church in America, agrees. :

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Most church growth specialists agree that the key to church growth is for church members to invite their friends to church. Often this strategy is communicated by a pastor asking his congregation how many came to the church because a friend/neighbor/ coworker invited them. The expected answer is usually given. A majority raise their hands, and we all assume that this is the most plausible strategy for church growth. *Bad assumption.*”

Now, I’ve even made this assumption in the past, prior to my dissertation research. I’ve told you before that church historian Martin Marty says one word defines the difference between churches that grow and those that do not -- the word “**Invite!**” He cited a study indicating the average Presbyterian invites someone to church once every twenty-four years. (The *Presbyterian Layman* reported that statistic was shared with an elder commissioner in the San Jose Presbytery, who promptly scoffed and responded, “I don’t buy that statistic, once every 24 years. I’ve been a Presbyterian over *fifty* years, and I’ve *never* invited anyone to church!”). Another poll often cited by Billy Graham indicated that some **84%** of church members surveyed said they first came to church because of an invitation from a friend or relative. Now, if 84% of church members first came to church through the invitation of a friend or relative, **and** the average Presbyterian only invites people to church once every 24 years ... well, that would seem not to be conducive to Presbyterian church growth. However, I’ve now come to believe invitation should not be the front line strategy for effective church growth. Mrs. Hunt goes on:

I am not minimizing the importance of church members inviting unchurched friends to church. Reaching others with the Gospel is surely part of the Great Commission given to us by our Savior, and it is our privilege and responsibility to obey with zeal. What I am saying is that this should not be the front line of offense in a church-growth strategy. The biblical model for church growth begins with Christian families. The offspring of Christian parents should be our primary target

group. We want as many people as possible to have a ‘Timothy Testimony’, who from infancy has known and has been taught the holy scriptures.¹⁶³

Mrs. Hunt goes on rightly observe that no matter how many new converts we may bring in the front door of the church, if we lose our children out the back door, we are missing the starting point of our Lord’s Acts 1:8 imperative. We are to begin where we are, in our “Jerusalem,” at home. An effective church-growth strategy, in fact, a biblical church growth strategy, would begin in our own homes, the “first church,” and with the children in our “family of families,” our churches. If we fail at doing that, it would seem unlikely that “Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth” would give any credence to the integrity, viability and/or truthfulness of our faith.

But oh, if we were to succeed ... what a wonderfully effective strategy for durable, long lasting church growth and vitality.

¹⁶³ Susan Hunt, Heirs of the Covenant: Leaving a Legacy of Faith for the Next Generation (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books, 1998), 115-116.

The following was delivered Mother's Day, May 11, 2003:

Abiding Faith, Hope and Love

As most if not all of you know, I am in the middle of a two-week residency at the Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary; this is the first of three such residencies as part of the doctoral program. Much of the week focused on the rich spiritual heritage of New England's original Puritan settlers through lectures, student reports, visits to various historical sites in the area, individual consultations with faculty, and often-lively group discussion. I gained a whole new perspective on those remarkable people who've received much bad historical press over the years; for me, so many negative stereotypes were dispelled. Like us, they were a complex mixture of good mixed with the bad, but they have lots to teach us. Three primary reasons the Puritans should be studied:

(1) *They point us to God.* The Puritans were, as one historian put it, God-obsessed people. We, on the other hand, tend to be *self*-obsessed, self-centered ... just check out the titles in any Border's bookstore if you want proof of that. The Puritans consistently modeled their two primary reasons for living: (1) To *glorify God*, and (2) to *seek the common good*. We're so turned in upon ourselves with our personal goals, our hopes of personal profit, our desires for personal pleasure, our yearning for personal fulfillment. But we aren't to work and live just to fulfill ourselves, which we will never completely succeed at doing, anyway. Nor are we to work and live just so we can "buy more stuff" ... we'll never buy enough to be satisfied. The early Puritans found their fulfillment in working and living for the glory of God, and for the common good of the *community*.

(2) *They point us to the word of God.* They were people of the Book; they built their lives around it. They knew their Scriptures well ... the average nine-year-old child would have a grasp of the Scriptures that would rival most seminarians' today! As one Puritan preacher expressed it (I believe it was Cotton Mather), "The Bible is a love letter sent to you by God - read it - not only let it inform you, but let it *in flame* you."

(3) *They point us to what God has told us, or called us, to do.* For the most part, the Puritans believed in their calling to complete the Reformation. They loved the Church. As Governor John Winthrop asserted in his grand sermon, Model of the Christian Church, the Church of England was their dear mother, the faithful mother which birthed and nurtured faith in their hearts. The vast majority of them really wanted to renew the church, to purge the corruption from her; they were a renewal group who sought to reform the church from within. The Pilgrims who had earlier landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620 were of a different sort; they were mostly separatists. Unlike most Puritans, they no longer sought to reform the Church of England; they thought the church was beyond help, and they desired separation from her. That was not the case with the original Massachusetts Bay Colony. Their motivation was they really believed if they could just "model" it, if they could just "do it right" and build a shining "city on a hill" for all the world to see, a truly Christian civilization, that it would inspire a grand reformation of the church of England, and perhaps even the whole world. They believed passionately in this dream, and that God was calling them to it. It was their driving vision.

These people were not ignorant, superstitious, freaky fanatics. Many of them were the cream of the crop. The early settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony included

more than one hundred graduates of Oxford and Cambridge. One modern historian termed colonial Massachusetts *“the best educated community the world has ever known.”* It was within six years of their arrival, while still trying to hack out an existence in a daunting wilderness, that the Puritans founded a religious college and named it Harvard. One of the common distractions during those first classes were the bears who kept wandering through campus ... yet classes were taught in Latin and steeped in the Western Christian classical tradition. The Puritans were deeply emotional people; this really comes out in their writings. They were intense lovers and could be intense haters. They loved their spouses and their children fiercely. It is true that promiscuity was virtually absent from colonial New England, but it was not because they were the “passionless Puritans” of the stereotype. Far from it! Puritan families were notoriously very large. And I’m sorry, you just can’t have lots and lots of kids and be passionless ... or constantly dour, somber and serious as the stereotype depicts! They were intensely reverent, intensely intellectual, intensely purposeful, and intensely joyful ... nothing in their lives was done unthinkingly or unfeelingly. They believed their life mattered, they wanted to live it to the full, and they believed intensely what they were doing was more important than anything else in the world.

To understand the Puritans, we have to understand they saw life as a great and grand adventure. They wanted to live well, and, when the time came, they wanted to die well. They yearned for a dream, and they uprooted everything in their lives to pursue that dream, including homes, safety, and security. That dream was to take this unique opportunity in the course of human history to go and try to build a truly Christian civilization, a “new world order.” You have to remember this was not an easy place to

live back then, nor was it easy to even get here. Motivation had to be *huge* to make such a move. Being part of the “errand into the wilderness” was the adventure of a lifetime! I Corinthians 13 ends with this verse: “*So faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*” Abiding faith, hope and love are very much on display in the lives of the Puritan settlers of this region. They were people of unshakable faith, people of indomitable hope, people of intense love of God, family and neighbor. As you may have guessed, you’ll be hearing more about these folks the next couple of years.

Now, for the part of the sermon I had prepared before I left last week, I would like to direct our attention to the Gospel reading from John, a passage normally read during Holy Week. Just as abiding faith, hope and love were very much on display in the early Puritans, so abiding faith, hope and love are on display here at the foot of the cross.

First, **Faith**. As this is Mother’s Day, I’d like to first look at Mary, the mother of Jesus, as she stands there at the cross. Perhaps this is reading between the lines, but there is something significant in what the Bible does not say about Mary. Note that she is not wailing. She is not tearing at her clothes, nor beating her breasts, nor wringing her hands, nor tearing at her hair ... all of which are customary practices for those who mourn. Nowhere in the Gospels do we read that Mary displays the customary actions of grief and mourning. Rather, it seems Mary is *composed*.

Put yourself in her shoes (or, sandals) for a minute. It has to be one of the most difficult human experiences for a parent to watch a child suffer and die. She could be thinking many things ... why couldn’t her son have led a normal, quiet life? Marry a nice Jewish girl and settle down? She was his mother, after all! Insults hurled at him she certainly felt. I’m sure she felt to a large measure the pain he felt. Yet, her son was also

her Lord. Now, children often try to lord it over their parents, but this is one case where it might be justified! Though it may have been difficult for Mary to fully comprehend, I think she knew this was not the end. She knew him perhaps better than anyone there. Like many mothers, she knew and understood her son better than anyone, and probably better than anyone she knew him to be true to His word. More than likely she had utmost confidence He would do what He said He would do ... and He said He would be back. His disciples didn't understand Him when He said it, but she must have remembered His words. In the tragic face of death, in the dark shadows of apparent loss, her faith gave her composure, her faith gave her stability, her faith in God's son and her son made her strong. **Faith** abides at the cross in the person of Mary.

Next, **Hope**. This is personified by the one the Gospel refers to as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*," who remains unnamed. The consensus of scholarship over the years is the "beloved disciple" is John himself. Not everyone thinks that; I'll come back to that. One thing to notice is this follower, whoever he is, is within conversational earshot of the cross. All the other disciples have fled the scene, except Judas, who had committed suicide. They all had a valid fear that they, being his friends and supporters, were next on the "hit list." Their cause seemed lost; their hopes, their dreams, their ideals were also being crucified on that cross. They no longer had any hope, so they didn't hang around. No disciples followed Jesus to the foot of the cross. No one, that is, except this "*disciple whom Jesus loved*." He braves the circumstances and comes right up to the foot of the cross. He chooses to take his stand by his Lord, come what may, ready to do his Lord's bidding. In the stark simplicity of this account, it is easy to miss just how remarkable is this act of simply being there.

Note, too, he has absolutely no hesitation in doing what Jesus calls him to do. He immediately takes Mary into his care. Anyone who has taken either a close friend or relative into their family knows what an imposition that can be, but this disciple does not hesitate. He does what he is called by his Lord to do; his courage makes him useful.

Now: just who *is* this disciple? Again, most say it is John. However, there are a few of contrarian scholars who speculate it just might be ... Lazarus. It's an interesting thought! First, we need to know the term "disciple" was not limited to the Twelve in the Gospels. Many were referred to as "disciples." We see in John's Gospel the raising of Lazarus from the dead receiving the fullest treatment of all Jesus' miracles. John also makes an express point of specifically saying Jesus *loved* Lazarus (*and his sisters*), which is not said about anyone else in any of the gospels.

If Lazarus is indeed the "beloved disciple" here, this might account for his boldness. After all, what's the worst the authorities can do to him? Kill him? Well, he's *been* dead. "*Been there, done that!*" Lazarus might have replied. He is utterly fearless, because it's kind of hard to frighten a dead man ... or, one who has already been dead. And who can better attest to Jesus' power over death than one who Jesus raised from the dead? Lazarus' hope is sure ... he is certain there is life beyond the shadow we call death. And that hope emboldens him, it gives him utter confidence even in the face of apparent tragedy and sorrow, and it makes him a useful disciple. No fear, not even the fear of death, will keep him from serving his Lord.

Finally, **Love**. One of Jesus' final acts on the cross is a loving act. He provides for His mother. He is not so caught up in His own pain and suffering to the point of being self-absorbed and oblivious to the needs of the one who sacrificed much to give

him birth and raise him. He is not so caught up in his own pain and suffering as to forget about the care of his aging mother. Note, He calls her “Woman,” which may sound harsh to our ears ... He doesn’t call her “Mother” or “Mom;” He calls her “Woman.” It might just be His way of reminding her He was someone other than her son; for He is her Lord. In calling her “Woman” instead of “mother,” perhaps He is gently and lovingly reinforcing her already-strong faith, encouraging her confidence, by reminding her He really is more than just her son. One of the most loving things anyone can do, especially in the face of grief, is to remind people of the reality of just who Jesus Christ is, and the trustworthiness of His promises, which is what Jesus does for His mother.

The greatest act of love at the cross, however, was not for his mother alone ... although it certainly included her. Jesus greatest act of love was for us all. The greatest demonstration of the love of God is while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. At the cross of Jesus Christ, and at the root of the grand spiritual heritage of those who first settled this region, these three remain ... faith, hope and love.

And the *greatest* of these ... is love.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH SURVEY, SAMPLING OF STATISTICS, SHORT ANSWER ESSAY RESPONSES

The cover letter and the accompanying survey that follows represents my fledgling sociological attempt to demographically verify family dynamics play an overwhelmingly powerful role in the development of and adherence to matters of faith, and that strong families can continue to produce strong churches in New England. As mentioned in the accompanying cover letter, this survey was delivered to four hundred homes in Rhode Island. Approximately half were sent to members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation I serve; 133 of those were returned. The others were delivered to the families of West Bay Christian Academy, an interdenominational, independent Christian school of 210 K-8 students representing fifty-two different churches in the state; 72 of those were returned.

This was developed and sent out in the early stages of my thesis preparation; perhaps too early ... had I designed and developed this later in my preparation, I would have been more specific and focused in creating survey questions that would result in responses relevant to my theme. Due to this and a number of related factors (e.g., a personal lack of experience and expertise in statistical analysis, the lack of time and/or means in an already-too-full schedule to be adequately trained in such, the aforementioned broad-reaching nature of this survey's questions), I found I was unproductively spending too much time and resources this past year trying to interpret and make this survey "work," and nearly abandoned the effort altogether.

There is much contained here that may be developed and interpreted further at another time; for now I am only providing very general and preliminary observations and interpretations of results received that I believe reflect the premises of this thesis. Also included in full are the written portions of the responses.

161 Posnegansett Avenue
Warwick, RI 02888
December 13, 2004

Dear Friends,

Many of you know me in my capacity as pastor of the Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian; many others of you know me as the current president of the West Bay Christian Academy Board of Trustees. What many of you may not know is that I am also a doctoral student at the Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, MA, and am currently engaged in a dissertation project I hope will make a helpful contribution to all three faith communities.

I would like to ask a favor of you.

If you would be kind enough to take a few minutes in the next week or so to complete the enclosed questionnaire, I would be most appreciative. If there is another adult in your home who would like to participate, their input is certainly welcome as well; please feel free to make a copy of the enclosed for that purpose.

I've enclosed a self-addressed envelope; inside that envelope is a stamp. Should you wish to help in this project, please use the stamp and envelope to mail your completed survey. Should you care not to participate, please accept the stamp as a small Christmas gift to you on behalf of a worthy cause (*ed. note: enclosed was a commemorative Breast Cancer Research stamp*). Be assured this is being done at my personal expense; no church or school resources are being used to finance this survey which is being mailed to four hundred select addresses.

For your information, a brief summary of this particular stage of my project/dissertation may be found on the back of this page. Portions of the enclosed survey were copied or adapted from an extensive 1989 study funded by the Lilly Endowment and conducted by Drs. Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson and Donald Luidens. This study formed the basis for an excellent article entitled "Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline," in the magazine First Things (March 1993; available at www.firstthings.com) and their book Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers (Westminster/John Knox Press, c. 1994). Dr. Hoge sent me their original questionnaire and granted permission to use and adapt for my purposes.

Again, should you wish to participate, if you would be so kind as to complete this in the next week or so, I would be most grateful. Should you care to elaborate further on any answer(s), feel free to do so on another sheet of paper. There is no need to sign your name; anonymity and confidentiality will be respected. Thank you for your consideration, time and trouble.

May God bless you with a Merry Christmas and a healthy, happy New Year.

Best regards,

Stephen L. Clark

P.S. Completed surveys may also be faxed, emailed, hand-delivered, or placed in my children's backpacks! Fax: 781-8833 or 739-8067, e-mail revclark1@cox.net.

CONFIDENTIAL SURVEY

I am a ____ *Male* ____ *Female* of ____ years of age. I have lived in New England ____ years.

1. Were you ever baptized in a (circle one) *Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Congregational, Church of Christ, Orthodox, (other)* _____, Church? .

____ *No* ____ *Do not know* ____ *Yes, at age* ____

2. Were you ever confirmed in a (circle one) *Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Congregational, Church of Christ, Orthodox, (other)* _____, Church?

____ *No* ____ *Do not know* ____ *Yes, at age* ____

3. Were you ever dedicated as an infant or small child?

____ *No* ____ *Yes* ____ *Do not know*

If yes, in what type of church congregation? (circle letter)

- A. *Denominational Baptist (e.g., American Baptist, Southern Baptist)*
- B. *Independent Baptist*
- C. *Independent/Bible*
- D. *Assemblies of God*
- E. *Other Denomination* _____
- F. *Other* _____

4. Were you ever baptized as an adult/young adult?

____ *No* ____ *Do not know* ____ *Yes, at age* ____

If yes, in what type of church congregation? (circle letter)

- A. *Denominational Baptist (e.g., American Baptist, Southern Baptist)*
- B. *Independent Baptist*
- C. *Independent/Bible*
- D. *Assemblies of God*
- E. *Other Denomination* _____
- F. *Other* _____

5. In your pre-teen years (*12 and younger*), how often did you attend worship, Sunday School and/or church related programs and functions?

____ *Every week*
____ *Two or three times a month*
____ *Once a month or less*
____ *Never*
____ *Don't know*

During this time, I lived under the care of:

- ☐ *Both parents*
- ☐ *Mother only*
- ☐ *Father only*
- ☐ *Mother, Step-father*
- ☐ *Step-mother, Father*
- ☐ *None of the above; I lived under the care of _____*
- ☐ *Mixed: The situation changed to _____ when I was age _____.*

Were your parents ever separated, divorced or widowed during this time?

6. In your teen years (13 - 18), how often did you attend worship, Sunday School and/or church related programs?

- ☐ *Every week*
- ☐ *Two or three times a month*
- ☐ *Once a month or less*
- ☐ *Never*
- ☐ *Don't know*

During this time, I lived under the care of:

- ☐ *Both Parents*
- ☐ *Mother only*
- ☐ *Father only*
- ☐ *Mother, Stepfather*
- ☐ *Step-mother, Father*
- ☐ *None of the above; I lived under the care of _____*
- ☐ *Mixed: The situation changed to _____ when I was age _____.*

Were your parents ever separated, divorced or widowed during this time?

7. In fifteen or fewer words, how would you describe your mother's religious belief, preference and/or intensity?

Your father's?

How often did she attend church services?

- ☐ *Every week*
- ☐ *Two or three times a month*
- ☐ *Once a month or less*
- ☐ *Never*
- ☐ *Don't know*

How often did he attend?

- ☐ *Every week*
- ☐ *Two or three times a month*
- ☐ *Once a month or less*
- ☐ *Never*
- ☐ *Don't know*

8. Were you compelled by your parent(s) to go to church? ☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes, would they force you to go even when you did not want to go? ☐ No ☐ Yes

9. Was there a time in your teen years when you rebelled against your religious upbringing?

___ No ___ Yes, at age _____.

If yes, what was the main reason (*in fifteen or fewer words*)?

10. At what age did you move out of your parents' household? _____

11. How much formal education have you completed? _____

Have you earned any post-high school academic degrees? ___ No ___ Yes

If yes, please list:

12. Were you ever active in Young Life, Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade for Christ, Navigators, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, or a similar para-church (*i.e., not sponsored by any particular church*) ministry?

___ No ___ Yes (*write in:*) _____

13. Was there a time in your college/young adult years when you departed from your religious upbringing?

___ No ___ Yes, at age _____

If yes, what was the main reason?

Did you reside primarily at your parents' home during these years?

14. How many times since you left school have you made a major change in occupation or profession? Do not count changes of jobs or promotions with the same field of occupation; count changes in type of work.

___ None
___ One
___ Two
___ Three
___ Four or more

15. Are you now married? ___ No ___ Yes

If yes, is this your first marriage? ___ Yes ___ No, second ___ No, third ___ No, other

Were you ever divorced or widowed? ___ No ___ Yes, divorced ___ Yes, widowed

If married, please answer 16-22. If remarried, please give answers for each marriage.

16. How old were you at the time of your marriage?
17. Were you married in a religious ceremony?
18. In fifteen or fewer words, describe your spouse's religious preference and/or intensity at the time of the marriage.
19. Please describe your religious preference and/or intensity at the time of the marriage.
20. How would you describe your spouse's religious preference and/or intensity now?
21. Your own?
22. Do you have any children? ___No ___Yes, I have _____ (number)
Step-children? ___No ___Yes, I have _____ (number)
23. In fifteen or fewer words, describe how your child's/children's religious preferences compare with your own.
24. Was there ever a time in your life when you became inactive in church life; i.e., you did not attend church more often than four times a year? ___No ___Yes
- If yes, at what age(s) did that begin? _____
- In fifteen or fewer words, what was the main reason you became inactive?
- Are you inactive now; i.e., not attending any church more than four times a year?
- ___No ___Yes
- If "No," what was the main reason you became active again?
25. What is your present denomination and/or church affiliation?
26. Did you switch from one denomination and/or affiliation to another at any time since your teen years?
- ___No ___Yes, I switched from _____ to _____

Was there a second switch?

___ No ___ Yes, I switched from _____ to _____

A third?

27. In the last year, how often have you attended church and/or church functions?

___ *Once a week or more*
___ *Two or three times a month*
___ *Once a month*
___ *About four times or lessr*
___ *Never*

28. Do you (or, if they're no longer at home, did you) direct that your child(ren) receive religious instruction?

___ *No*
___ *No, I prefer children learn such things on their own at their timing and desire*
___ *Yes, mainly at home*
___ *Yes, mainly at the church*
___ *Yes, at home and at church*
___ *Yes, at home, church and school*

29. In general, in the past ten years has your level of interest and involvement in religious matters:

___ *Increased*
___ *Decreased*
___ *Stayed about the same*

If increased or decreased, describe in fifteen or fewer words what you think has caused the change.

30. Which of the following two statements comes closest to your present opinion/conviction?

___ *A basic, ultimate moral and spiritual truth exists for all humanity*
___ *There is no basic, ultimate moral and spiritual truth that exists for all humanity*

SAMPLING OF STATISTICS

At the time of this tally, 205 surveys had been returned, 2 were incomplete.

Marriages

170 (82.9%) reported that as pre-teens they attended worship, Sunday School, and/or church related programs and functions either every week or two or three times a month and lived under the care of both parents. Of these 170, 143 (84.1%) continued to attend throughout their teens and lived with both parents.

Of those 143, 85 (59.4%) responded that both parents attended church services regularly (i.e. two or three times a month or more). 65 (76.5%) of them are currently in first marriages, 7 (16.7%) are widowed, and 12 (14%) are divorced. 1 never married.

Of the 143 who continued to attend throughout their teens and lived with both parents, 42 (29.3%) responded that only their mothers attended church services on a regular basis. 24 (57.1%) are currently in first marriages, 7 (16.7%) are widowed, and 10 (23.8%) are divorced. 1 never married.

Of the 143, 16 (11.2%) reported that neither parent attended church services on a regular basis. 8 (50%) of them are in their first marriages, 5 (31.3%) are widowed, and 2 (12.5%) are divorced.

Of the 33 remaining surveys:

17 (51.5%) lived with both parents as preteens and did not attend church and/or church activities on a regular basis. 12 (70.6%) reported that neither parent attended on a regular basis, 3 (17.6%) reported that only their mothers had attended church regularly, and 2 (11.8%) reported that both parents attended regularly. 12 (70.6%) are in first marriages, and 5 (29.4%) are divorced.

12 (75%) lived with one parent and attended services on a regular basis. 9 (75%) of them reported the custodial parent (mother) attended services regularly. All 12 (100%) are in first marriages.

4 (12.1%) lived with one parent and did not attend services regularly. 2 (50%) of them had one parent (one's mother and another's father) who attended services regularly. All 4 (100%) are currently in first marriages.

Church Attendance:

170 (82.9%) reported that as pre-teens they attended worship, Sunday School, and/or church related programs and functions either every week or two or three times a month and lived under the care of both parents. Of these 170, 143 (84.1%) continued to attend throughout their teens and lived with both parents.

Of these 143, 85 (59.4%) of those responding said that both parents attended church on a regular basis. 65 of these 85 are currently in first

marriages and 7 are widowed (72 total 84.7%). Of these 72, 30 (41.7%) experienced a time in their lives when they did not attend church more than 4 times per year. 37 of the 72 (51.4%) now attend regularly.

42 of the 143 (29.3%) responded that only their mothers had attended regularly. 24 of them are currently in their first marriages, and 7 are widowed (31 total 73.8%). Of these 31, 12 (38.7%) had been inactive in the church for a period of time, and 28 (90.3%) now attend services regularly.

16 of the 143 reported that neither parent attended regularly. 8 of them are in first marriages and 5 are widowed (13 total 81.3%). 3 (23%) of them had been inactive for a time, and 11 (84.6%) now attend services regularly.

Of the 33 remaining surveys,

17 lived with both parents but did not attend services as a preteen. 11 (64.7%) of them had been inactive in the church, and 15 (88.2%) now attend church services regularly.

12 lived with only one parent, and attended services on a regular basis. 5 (41.7%) had been inactive in church life, and all 12 (100%) now attend regularly.

4 lived with only one parent and did not attend church related activities. 3 (75%) experienced a time in their lives when they were not active in church life and all 4 (100%) now attend church services regularly.

Children

In answer to question #28, “Do you direct that your children receive religious instruction?”

7 (3.9%) responded “No”

5 (2.8%) responded “No, I prefer children learn such things on their own at their timing and desire”

1 (.6%) responded “Yes, mainly at home”

47 (26%) responded “Yes, mainly at church”

64 (35%) responded “Yes, at home and at church”

57 (31.5%) responded “Yes, at home, church, and school”

Level of Interest and Involvement in religious matters in the past ten years

132 (67%) increased

10 (5%) decreased

55 (27.9%) stayed about the same

The 207 participants who returned these surveys consist of primarily active church members (93.7% reported themselves to be such), who attend church and/or church functions on a regular basis (69.6 % attend once a week or more, and an additional 25.1 % attend 2 or 3 times per month). I’ve divided the respondents into three main groupings, following guidelines used by Gary MacIntosh in his book *One Church Four Generations*. The **Builders** (ages 56 and older), the **Boomers** (ages 36-55), the **Busters** (ages 24-35). MacIntosh also includes the **Bridgers** (under 24); however, no surveys were returned from any in this age bracket.

BUSTERS:

As pre-teens, **92.9%** lived with both parents, although 21.4% reported that their parents were divorced at that time. 85.7% attended church regularly, with 78.6 % attending every week and 7.1 % attending 2 or 3 times per month.

As teens, **85.7%** lived with both parents (7.1% reported their parents to be separated at this time), 71.4% attended church regularly, with 57.1% attending every week and 14.3% attending 2 or 3 times per week.

64.3% of the Busters had mothers who attended church regularly (50% attended every week, 14.3% attended 2 or 3 times per month. 50 % of fathers attended regularly (28.6% attended weekly, 21.4 % attended 2 or 3 times per week.

78.6% felt compelled by their parents to attend.

57.1% rebelled against their religious upbringing as teens, and 50% departed from their religious upbringing as young adults (71.4 % of them were not living at their parents' home at this time).

100% are currently married in first marriages. 92.9% were married in a religious ceremony. 92.9 % have children.

100 % currently attend church regularly, with 92.9% reporting weekly church attendance and 7.1 % attending 2 or 3 times per month, and 100% consider themselves to be active church members.

85.7% reported an increase in their level of interest and involvement in religious matters over the past ten years.

BOOMERS:

As pre-teens, **91.4%** lived with both parents, although 7.3% reported that their parents were divorced or separated at that time. **84.3%** attended church regularly, with 72.2 % attending every week and 12.0 % attending 2 or 3 times per month.

As teens, **85.8%** lived with both parents (5.5% reported their parents to be divorced or separated at this time), **72.2 %** attended church regularly, with **50%** attending every week and **22.2%** attending 2 or 3 times per week.

81.3% of the Busters had mothers who attended church regularly (68.2% attended every week, 13.1% attended 2 or 3 times per month. 58.1 % of fathers attended regularly (44.8% attended weekly, 13.3 % attended 2 or 3 times per week.

72.5% felt compelled by their parents to attend.

58.7% rebelled against their religious upbringing as teens, and 56.5% departed from their religious upbringing as young adults (**82.6 %** of them were not living at their parents' home at this time.

86.2% are currently married, 77.1% in first marriages. 76.1% were married in a religious ceremony. 96.3 % have children.

95.3 % currently attend church regularly, with 68.2% reporting weekly church attendance and 27.1 % attending 2 or 3 times per month, and 94.5% consider themselves to be active church members.

61.5% reported an increase in their level of interest and involvement in religious matters over the past ten years.

BUILDERS

As pre-teens, **96.3%** lived with both parents, although 3.6% reported that their parents were divorced at that time. **98.8%** attended church regularly, with 88% attending every week and 10.8 % attending 2 or 3 times per month.

As teens, **89.2%** lived with both parents (2.4% reported their parents to be separated or divorced at this time), **96.4%** attended church regularly, with **71.1%** attending every week and **25.3%** attending 2 or 3 times per week.

80.2% of the Builders had mothers who attended church regularly (65.4% attended every week, 14.8% attended 2 or 3 times per month. **46.3 %** of fathers attended regularly (37.5% attended weekly, 8.8 % attended 2 or 3 times per week.

77.4% rebelled against their religious upbringing as teens, and 34.5% departed from their religious upbringing as young adults (69% of them were not living at their parents' home at this time.)

71.4% are currently married, **94.9%** had one marriage. 76.2% were married in a religious ceremony. 98.8 % have children.

94 % currently attend church regularly, with 67.5% reporting weekly church attendance and 26.5 % attending 2 or 3 times per month, and 91.7% consider themselves to be active church members.

50% reported an increase in their level of interest and involvement in religious matters over the past ten years.

Short Essay Answers

The reader should keep in mind that the following replies are, for the most part, written by highly motivated and very active church members, at least two (and perhaps six) of whom home school their children in order to pass the baton of faith on to their progeny. Also, approximately one third of the respondents are parents so motivated by their faith convictions that they make the sacrifices necessary to enroll their children in private Christian schooling; as former president of the Board of Trustees of that institution, I know many had to make considerable sacrifices to do so. In a word, these respondents are sincere people who take their faith commitments seriously, and I believe are representative of the “cream” of the Rhode Island Christian community “crop.” I would like to also note 203 of the respondents affirmed their conviction on question 30 that a basic, ultimate moral and spiritual truth exists for all humanity, while only 6 indicated there is no such basic, ultimate moral and spiritual truth that exists.

Note how many choose to communicate matters of faith solely in somewhat generic terms of church involvement/attendance, denominational affiliation, and/or cultural identity, and *not* in personal terms of experiential spiritual encounter, heart commitment, or salvational/relational language as would be expected for those qualifying for church membership under the fourth criteria of seventeenth-century New England Puritanism. It seems were that fourth criteria somehow imposed today, many, if not most, of these respondents ... who, again, are highly-motivated and very active church members, representative of the Rhode Island “cream” of the faithful “crop” ... would not qualify for church membership. This is the present reality, however; these are the people in our Rhode Island churches, who have answered the call to service, are faithfully

supporting the ministry of the church with their time, talents and treasure, presenting their children and themselves for baptism, participating in worship, partaking of the Lord's supper, feeding the hungry, helping the poor, visiting the sick in Jesus' name, and many are even taking great pains to ensure their children and/or grandchildren are taught the precepts of our faith in home, church and school.

I'd like to reiterate what's expressed at the close of the thesis: Had the members of the 1776 Continental Army been held to the exacting military standards of the King's army prior to service, there might well have never been a Continental Army remaining at all, just as the too-exacting standards for Puritan church membership caused the ecclesiastical structure to shrink until it could no longer hold together. Those were the ones, though, who answered the call to liberty, and that ragtag assemblage proceeded to take on the highly disciplined, experienced, battle-hardened, formidable British redcoats and eventually prevailed. One of the salient leadership strengths of Washington was his ability to see things as they were, not as he would wish them to be, and to labor and lead within the framework of that reality. He served (and was served by), developed, worked with, made huge sacrifices for and successfully led this diverse assembly of people who had responded to the call to liberty. He helped them to never lose sight of the "goodness of our cause," built on their individual and corporate strengths while minimizing their weaknesses, and went on to accomplish an outcome that bordered on the miraculous.

May God grant us all grace and wisdom to see things as they are, not as we wish they would be, and, empowered and guided by His spirit, may we serve, labor and lead within the framework of that reality; thus enabling us and those we are called to serve to more fully enter and enjoy the glorious family liberty of the children of God.

Question 7: In fifteen or fewer words, how would you describe your mother's religious belief, preference and/or intensity?

Believe in God, Church for grounding. She moved and went to church less.

Faithful Catholic and attends church about once a week

My mother, a Roman Catholic, believed then and still today that she does not have to attend church to be faithful and spiritual. I would characterize her religious belief to be lukewarm in tradition and responsibility, although she would not see it that

Not involved in church activities.

Atheist/Humanist/Zionist

I believe my mother had a strong faith but remained quiet about it. She passed away when I was 21.

Non believer-raised Catholic-hates organized religion-gets angry when we express our faith on God.

During divorce she was "shunned" by people at her church in Dallas. She left the Lord and has not yet to return.

My mother was/is a strong believer, but she was "put down" for this because my father was a non believer.

Discouraged Roman Catholic

"Golden Rule Parents"-Value of religion was for children to learn this and other similar Christian Values.

Intense Protestant, somewhat fundamental, born again as growing adult.

My mother is very religious-it's a big part of her life.

Church was a socially acceptable activity, no belief in a personal God

My mom is a Christian woman who is very much believes in God. However she does not attend worship.

My mother is a catholic by upbringing and has remained dedicated in practice through disagreeing with many of the church's social teachings.

She is a believer in Jesus Christ

A fairly devout Roman Catholic. Attended church weekly. Not overly involved.

Attends weekly services in Roman Catholic church but does not know God.

Recently advocated euthanizing her own mother for convenience, though she is not sick.
(ed. comment -"!")

Habit. Guilt. Fear of persecution from her parents. Roman Catholic and raised that way.

Believe very strongly.

Mom is a lifetime, traditional, weekly member of a Catholic church.

Claimed to be Roman Catholic but never practiced

Good Christian, grew up Baptist.

Christian but not church going.

My mother became a born again believer when I was in college. So before that, little intensity. Now, she loves the Lord with all of her heart.

My mother was the daughter of Russian Orthodox immigrants. It is my understanding that she attended a Baptist church alone during her formative years. We were "dropped off" to attend Sunday School. Mom would occasionally go to church.

My mother was an active church member in her youth but did not attend after my siblings and I were born.

My mother believed in God in her heart and the Gospel but she let the ways of man lead her behavior.

Strong faith. Was the parent who made sure we went to church.

My mother was/is a dedicated Christian who took me to church regularly and was my spiritual guide growing up.

She is a born again Christian and has been since I was in my early twenties.

My mom grew up in a Lutheran church and kept her faith strong in her family

My mother attends church every Sunday. She is not outwardly religious.

Mom is a true "Catholic" because she worries over what people think if she changed.

Very strong – a converted Catholic
Devout Catholic
My mother is very religious and is a member of Syrian Orthodox Church. Her father was a priest in the Syrian Orthodox Church in Mosul, Iraq.
Completely devoted to God and the Catholic church
She was a good Catholic.
Dedicated believer who valued studying scripture and participation in church and church activities.
Roman Catholic-church once a week and CCD as needed.
My mother would take us to church when we were young. As we grew older we did not attend as much.
Roman Catholic - moderate. No personal relationship with our Lord.
Obligatory, little enthusiasm.
Moderate-not very outspoken but consistent.
Devout Catholic all of her life.
Non believer. Obeyed my father's way. BUT when trained us one year in CCD! WOW!
Quietly, consistently Catholic. No personal relationship with Christ.
Completed the expected rituals of the church.
Strong, consistent, Biblical
Sincere
My mother was a Christian and she believes in God and attended church weekly and encouraged us to do so as well and to attend Sunday School.
Faithful to the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church
She believed in the gospel (Jesus) and her hope was her children would have a heart for the Lord.
Nominal believer-attended church sporadically. No involvement outside attendance.
Catholic Christian deeply committed to serving God
She considered herself a good Protestant and a good person. She was saved at age 80.
She has been less committed to regular organized worship since the death of her mother.
She is deeply religious most of the time.
Very religious and strong beliefs about God and the Bible.
Not intense but no expression of negativity.
A quiet settled Christian, who participated full in her church.
Fundamental Christian and today leans toward Pentecostal beliefs and churches.
She raised her children, however as American Baptists.
Devout Catholic
Never very religious-never talked about religion but we always went to church.
They no longer go at all for more than 20 years.
As the daughter of a Lutheran Minister, she was well grounded in her faith and loves the Lord.
She became a Christian in her 30's and started taking us (2 sisters and a brother) to church.
The experience was life-changing for her-and a witness to us.
Dedicated
Faithful church member, attendee, Bible believer and taught me how to pray and read the Bible.
She was a devoted Catholic, very religious but did not always agree with Church doctrine.
She accepted Christ as her Savior when I was 8. She has been a committed, Evangelical Christian since then.
Strong, personal, very intense, a lifeline in a very difficult time.
She believed in God, Jesus Christ and the church.
She believed; did not attend church however she was a caring, giving and kind-hearted person.
My step-mother was Episcopalian but saw to it we went to mass every Sunday and Holy Day
Very strong, attended Episcopalian
Very religious

Both parents were not church goers. They did not feel it was necessary.
Raised Baptist and attended church on a regular basis.
Lutheran and discouraged by dad to take us to church.
There was no strong religious upbringing. She would send me to church around the corner and I would walk there
She considers herself to be Roman Catholic. She attended regularly until her early 50's.
Confused-Explored several "Cults" and "New Age Movements"
Roman Catholic with a "Chinese food menu" approach.
UCC. Sang on church choir for 60 years.
I would say that my mother is religious as far as thought process but did not focus on going to church.
Roman Catholic-believes in God, finding her way back to church.
She had definite values and beliefs
Nonexistent
Had strong religious convictions and were evident in the way she lived from day to day.
Her religious beliefs were strong. She attended services weekly.
Christian attending mass every Sunday and affiliated with church functions every chance.
Very devoted Catholics, involved in many church organizations.
My mother's life revolved around the Catholic church
Moderate-average
Baptist
Very involved.
Believed in God and that church was important.
Comparable to average rural Evangelical believers, church life was an expected part of family life.
Strong Christian faith and convictions.
She was Unitarian when married but served in Protestant churches for years and began to agree with Protestant theology. We think she was baptized but don't know what church and at what age.
She is a Catholic who attends church regularly.
Strong faith, very religious; the most Christ-like person I know. Taught Sunday School and very active in church events.
Presbyterian, very deep strong faith.
My mother possesses a very strong belief in god and lived her entire life quietly practicing Christian values and providing us (her daughters) guidance in doing the same.
Strong faith-which she quietly lived.
My mother was brought up as a Roman Catholic but converted to Baptist when she married my father.
She was/is a life-long Presbyterian and has a deep, strong faith in God.
Very strong as her mother and father were very religious. Grandfather helped to build a Congregational church.
Was raised Methodist but became Presbyterian after marrying my father who was raised Baptist-involved in women's circles in church-really studied the Bible as an adult. Thought class was hard but she enjoyed it—didn't really share her religious beliefs
She was and still is a believer and still attends weekly.
She has always been a devout Catholic and continues to attend church every week.
Beliefs were strong and dedicated to the strict beliefs of the Roman Catholic church...and still is.
She was a very devout person, believed greatly in and we were told as youngsters that our religion was the most important thing, not mentioning JESUS CHRIST AS OUR SAVIOR.
Very strong faith in Jesus. Very dedicated to the church.
Very conservative Christian.

Mom was a God fearer who came to grasp Christianity's full meaning mid-life.
Attended church regularly, Presbyterian, sang in choir.
Dedicated Baptist
Very strong
Very involved in the Presbyterian church for over 40 years.
Strong Calumistic religious faith. Supported children to attend Christian grade school.
My mother was very faithful as well as fearful in the Roman Catholic church.
A faithful Baptist- Regular attendance.
My mother was Baptized in the Baptist church then moved and started going to a Congregational church. She was a very religious person and very involved in her church.
Oriented toward social justice, peace-making, intellectual, music a key focus.
She was a very dedicated Episcopalian and attended church regularly.
She believed that the Lord was her Savior.
Ardent church goer.
Extremely vital and strong, she was a Sunday School teacher and still is. Miss church - never!
Quiet, strong, steadfast faith.
Don't remember anything specific, except what I was allowed/not allowed to do on Sunday.
Strong belief and preference-moderate intensity.
Very intense.
She believes that God has a plan for each of us. Her intensity has warmed a bit as the years pass.
Mom stopped attending in my teen years. Don't know why-used to teach Sunday School and made sure I went weekly.
Went to Central Congregational Church
She was very active in many different groups like women's group to choir etc.
Both parents were very involved in their church as children and actually met at church at a young age. They attended service weekly and were involved in other organizations such as Demolay and Rainbow.
Attended church growing up
Raised in a Methodist background but her fore bearers were Quakers.
Strong Christian woman
Congregational
Mother never changed her affiliation from her church in Nova Scotia.
She did not attend church often but was a believer.
Did not go to church very often.
Not outwardly religious and did not attend church unless I was involved in a program.
She was raised Catholic, but always searching for the truth.
She believed we all should treat each other in a Christian way as a Presbyterian of firm belief.
Very Strong
She IS the church. 83 years old, Circle leader for 20 years, has been a deacon, involved in rummage sales, cooks for homeless - Presbyterian. Loves the music. Lives a selfless, Christ-like life.
Very strong.
She believed that church was important and it was important to believe in a good life. Live each day to it's fullest and that going to church every week was needed.
My mother is Presbyterian and has been deeply religious and faithful to the church for as long as I can remember.
Devout, strong, involved Congregationalist.
Very strong, she was a church elder.
Brought up Presbyterian, moved and became Methodist and then became Episcopalian.
Church was always important in her life-attended church weekly and was very active.

Mother didn't go to church when I was young but went back to her original church (Methodist) when I was a teen and she was very active.
Religious but not ostentatious. Was an elder in the Presbyterian church.
Episcopalian, fairly religious.
Very good. She was a Sunday teacher.
Strong and active
Intense Presbyterian
Devout Christian
Strong belief in God.
Born into the Methodist Episcopal church became a Baptist so that her 3 children could attend Sunday School. She later became very active.
Although brought up, baptized a Methodist she became Interested in Christian Science -never joined.
Attended church-Member of a circle-later years didn't attend much.
Sunday School teacher and active participant.
Strong religious beliefs and found comfort in the church's ministry,
Raised Baptist and had no religious belief, or at least never talked of it.
Truly believed in God but did not attend church.
She was the daughter of a Methodist minister. I feel my mother has always questioned her beliefs. She claims because so much was forced on her as a child.
Strong
She belongs to a nondenominational church and believes Jesus is her Savior.
Very active.
Strong faith based on Roman Catholic upbringing; important to attend weekly worship.
Roman Catholic background, but only went to church on major holidays.
Mom was a good caring, spiritual person who in my teens years sis not attend church.
I went to a Catholic school up to grade 6. My mother and father did not have us go to church on the weekends, we went occasionally, but we mostly attended church during the time at school. Sometimes my father would bring us on weekends.
My mom went to a Baptist church till they founded Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian. She loves to sing all those Baptist hymns and makes up her own words at times. She loves going to church.
She is a Protestant, does not consider herself very religious but attends church weekly.
Finds comfort in the religious community and enjoys the friendships and relationships she has made. Has a personal relationship with God.
Non committed before 30, modest till 50, stronger then due to a crisis.
Highly skeptical, even cynical toward the spiritual claims of others.
My mother has always been very active in the Presbyterian church and most influential person in our family.
Active in church functions, Congregational, not intense personal commitment, taught Sunday School.
Quiet and steadfastly Christian.
Very faithful-very involved in Church Community and church activities.
My mother had strong religious beliefs which began during her childhood and continued throughout her life. She was brought up in the Methodist church but due to schooling and relocation for work and family, belonged to other Protestant denominations.
She was active in the Baptist church. Her father had been Superintendent of Sunday School for many years.
Lives and breathes Greenwood Church to this day.
Deep belief-very involved in church activities.
Her religion meant a lot to her and she attended all church activities.
Believer but moderate in intensity.

Question 8: In fifteen or fewer words, how would you describe your father's religious belief, preference and/or intensity?

I believe my father's belief was strong as he was a Sunday School teacher. Eventual dimmed intensity but was rekindled strongly later in life.
Unknown. He does not talk about religion at all.
My father is Jewish, but non practicing. He has never involved himself, not spoke of, any religious belief for as long as I've known.
He was Episcopalian and we were brought up Catholic
Atheist/Humanist/Zionist
My father did not support or encourage going to church yet at 78 years old accepted Christ!
Believer-attends Catholic Church
Fairly intense, regular attendee, only recently (10 yrs) shows evidence of Godly life. The Lord was never a topic of conversation growing up.
My father accepted the Lord a few days before his death.
Nothing
"Golden Rave Parents"-Value of religion was for children to learn this and other similar Christian Values.
Same but milder in implementation
My father has not attendee church in over 25 years.
Attended regularly on Sundays, no other involvement or evidence of spiritual life.
My dad is a Christian woman who is very much believes in God. However he does not attend worship.
My stepfather was Protestant, but has been attending Catholic Mass with my mother since their marriage.
Unknown
Hates anything remotely related to God
None, didn't discourage or encourage, came to major events.
Believed very mildly.
Dad is Episcopal and goes to church on major holidays
Converted to Roman Catholic to marry but never attended church.
Good Christian grew up Methodist.
Christian but not church going.
My dad is a bit of a skeptic. He knows those of us who are true believers have something. But he is a bit of a proud man and thus far refuses to "join us".
Father was raised as a Congregationalist-Rarely attended church, although this changed with his 2nd wife.
He never spoke of any belief but his family had some attendance at the Methodist church.
Claimed to be Agnostic but at times of deep distress he could be caught turning to God.
Did not attend church-But drove us to and from church (Mother didn't drive)
My father did not attend church when I was young. He became a Christian when I was in early 20's. He is now a dedicated leader.
He was a believer for several years before he died at 40
He was not a believer in Jesus, was forced to go to church as a child.
He never attends church and he may not believe in God.
Believed, but did not discuss.
Mild
Removed Catholic
My father is also religious...however he is a bit more private about his faith. Also, he is a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church

Completely devoted to God and the Catholic Church
He was a good Catholic who became again which influenced him leaving Catholicism.
Dedicated believer who valued studying scripture and participation in church and church activities.
Roman Catholic-went along with mom.
My father would take us to church when we were young. As we grew older we did not attend as much. My father grew up Catholic and switched to Episcopal when we married.
Roman Catholic-moderate. No personal relationship with our Lord.
Obligatory, little enthusiasm.
Moderate-not very outspoken but consistent.
Devout Catholic all for his life.
Quiet man of great faith. He attended church several times a week at the end of his life. He did not lead us in faith as children, he let the church do that.
Consistent. No personal relationship with Christ.
Strong, consistent, Biblical
Father became somewhat annoyed by priests activity.
My father was a Christian and she believes in God and attended church weekly and encouraged us to do as well and to attend Sunday School.
He too was faithful to the traditions of the church but he was also seeking something deeper.
He was active for the church and led family dinner devotions weekly and on vacations, we always went to church
Nominal believer-attended church sporadically. No involvement outside attendance.
Baptized in a Lutheran church but became Catholic to marry mom.
He was a good person and went faithfully to church. Whichever Protestant church was closer to home.
He attends mass daily and prays the Rosary often.
He was religious but not intensely
Not as religious but did attend church regularly.
Strong faith and trust in God, saw people and needs from Jesus' perspective.
If a Christian, it was secret. Church was for women and children.
Raised Roman Catholic but was excommunicated after he married my mother and raised his children American Baptists.
Definitely believes in God; not consistent about going to church.
Never very religious-never talked about religion but we always went to church. They no longer go at all for more than 20 years.
Though a believer, he was not as well grounded as my mom and didn't like to talk about it much.
He resisted faith, then had a dynamic conversion in his early 40's which impacted us even more.
Dedicated
Bible believer and avid reader himself, prayerful and church member and attender. Picked up others to attend church.
He was a devoted Catholic, very religious but did not always agree with Church doctrine.
He accepted Christ when he was in his mid 30's. He was finally committed until he was 42. He is now an elder in a Bible Church.
Strong but less personal. The legalism and social/spiritual expectations of our GARBC church were an inappropriate stress for him.
Stepfather brought up Catholic. Did not attend church. Said his prayers nightly, and believed in Jesus (I found out about this when he was elderly).
My dad retained his Catholic religion
Birth father was Catholic
Did not attend church
Both parents were not church goers. They did not feel it was necessary.

Somewhat religious- He was a 32nd degree mason. Did not attend church as often as mom.
Catholic and discouraged mom but rarely took us to his church.
None
He was raised Presbyterian but has not practiced since his early 20's.
Agnostic
Born, raised and schooled by Jesuits. Hasn't attended church regularly since he graduated college.
UCC. Sand on choir for 40 years. 1st date was youth fellowship.
My father was a "Mason" and church was always important to him, However, going to church wasn't emphasized.
Roman Catholic-did not/does not attend church
Definitely not as committed
Nonexistent
I understand that my father attended church in Scotland but stopped before I was born. In his later years he attended church with my mother.
His religious faith was firm. He taught Sunday School for many years. He attended services every week.
Christian attending mass every Sunday and affiliated with church functions every chance.
Very devoted Catholics, involved in many church organizations.
My father followed my mother-(revolved around the Catholic church)
Borderline
Raised in a strict Baptist church
Wonderfully intense.
Believed in God and hoped that one day everybody would see that they needed Him in their lives.
Comparable to average rural Evangelical believers, church life was an expected part of family life.- although he sometimes put work ahead of church attendance.
Strong Christian faith and convictions.
My father was a "Preacher's kid"- His father became a Unitarian minister (Boy Preacher of the West) but his mother turned to the B'Hai faith-He ended up confused.
He is a Catholic who attends church regularly.
Strong Christian faith; very active in church matters; taught Sunday School, and elder, did lay preaching when needed.
Presbyterian, very deep strong faith.
He can be best described as a disciplinarian and God-fearing but not always the good example my mother was.
Strong faith-which he quietly lived.
He was a Baptist-Direct descendant of Roger Williams; very devout-set a good Christian example.
A Methodist, he was less faithful
Very strong as both parents were very religious-Grandfather sang in choir and grandmother an altar gild in Episcopal church.
Was raised Southern Baptist-became Presbyterian when married. I used to think my grandfather was a preacher (he did a lot of it) but he was a lawyer and then a judge. My father was an Elder at the Presbyterian church and went to meetings a lot. Didn't
He was a believer and grew up attending weekly.
He was also a devout Catholic and attended church regularly until health reasons prevented him from doing so.
Same. Beliefs were strong and dedicated to the strict beliefs of the Roman Catholic church...and still is.
The same as mom. She was a very devout person, believed greatly in and we were told as youngsters that our religion was the most important thing, not mentioning JESUS CHRIST AS OUR SAVIOR.
Very strong faith in Jesus. Very dedicated to the church.
Very conservative Christian. With a high intensity.

Dad was lukewarm although attended church more than mom in early marriage.
Attended church regularly, Presbyterian, was a deacon, also ushered regularly. Dad was brought up in a Baptist church.
Dedicated Baptist-Deacon
Little more lenient
Very involved in the Presbyterian church for over 40 years.
Strong Calumistic religious faith. Supported children to attend Christian grade school.
My father was a faithful believer in the Roman Catholic Church
Active member-Office holder-Baptist church
My father was Baptized in his late 30's. He was involved in church work but didn't talk much about his beliefs.
Supported her in a half-hearted manner.
He was a very dedicated Baptist and attended church regularly. She believed that the Lord was her Savior.
Ardent church goer.
Very strong and faithful. An elder who still helps on the Consistory, but wants youthful change.
Church Elder-believed it was his duty to believe rather than faith based.
Strong faith-read his Bible-participated in life of church-moderator of governing board.
Strong belief and preference-less intense.
Very intense.
My father doesn't outwardly express his religious beliefs.
Went weekly-strong faith.
He was very active too. He was a deacon and involved in many groups as a leader and member.
Both parents were very involved in their church as children and actually met at church at a young age. They attended service weekly and were involved in other organizations such as Demolay and Rainbow.
Attended church growing up
Roman Catholic-fallen away.
Backslider
Episcopalian
Dad never attended church here that I know of.
Did not go to church very often.
Same as mother-Not outwardly religious and did not attend church unless I was involved in a program.
He turned against the Methodist church and didn't attend any denomination as an adult
Lukewarm
Doesn't attend-never has, since childhood but loves nature and is very "moral" also prejudicial.
Nominal.
She believed that church was important and it was important to believe in a good life. Live each day to it's fullest and that going to church every week was needed.
My father was raised Baptist but now is Presbyterian. Not as involved as mom.
Uninspired Catholic.
Average, however he worked many Sundays so rarely attended church.
Said he believed in God, but rarely attended church.
My father didn't attend church as often, but it was important to him.
None, he was Catholic but became disenchanted.
Never showed any religious tendencies.
Unitarian.
No good. To much religious at his home growing up. His father was a lay man for the P. church in N.S. Canada.

Claims to be religious but does not attend
Inactive
He believed that he could be "close to God" on the golf course, ball field etc. But always took us to church every week.
My father said the Rosary as he walked his beat as a Policeman.
He was Christened in the Lutheran church. Only attended church on holidays and events.
Not too interested in organized religion.
Never attended church because of health-Believed-always repaired pastor's house or church with no charge.
Not as active only because of work schedule.
Deceased-When I was 12 he was an elder for a period of time before he died.
Raised Catholic and made my mom take us to church but seldom joined us.
Believed in God and wanted us to believe in God.
My father is a Christian attending a Methodist church as he was raised. He has always believed, but has not always attended church.
Strong till death
He belongs to a Catholic church and believes Jesus is his Savior.
Do not remember.
Brought up in Reformed faith but did not attend church.
Protestant background, while separated not very active, until remarried.
I believe that he had strong belief but did not attend church.
I went to a Catholic school up to grade 6. My mother and father did not have us go to church on the weekends, we went occasionally, but we mostly attended church during the time at school. Sometimes my father would bring us on weekends.
He believed in God, but did not think he had to attend church.
He is not religious and he has not attended church as an adult.
He has a personal relationship with God but does not feel the need/desire for organized religion.
Modest before 30, indifferent since then-"just be good and do your own thing"
Seemed to view religious practices as important to one's community standing; however, don't think he had a relationship with God.
Very minimal.
Same-Active in church functions, Congregational, not intense personal commitment, taught Sunday School, a deacon.
Same as mom-Quiet and steadfastly Christian, but he was more talkative about it!
My father's religious background was not as intense as my mother's but he was a member of our Baptist church and attended occasionally.
He seldom attended. He usually came when I played my violin in Church-Palm Sunday.
Non-existent
Belief but not active in church-but supportive of our beliefs.
Never went to church.
Less active than mother, somewhat agnostic.

Question 9: Was there a time in your teen years that you rebelled against your religious upbringing? If yes, what was the main reason?

Mainly because my parents stopped attending regularly. My brother hadn't gone regularly and my friends either. I'm glad I went when I did.

Had no religious upbringing

Saw no reason for it.

Made wrong friends and poor choices.

No support from religious leaders. Great time @ BYF.

Wasn't interested.

Did not approve of parent's church's views of women as less than men and their indifference to social justice.

When I was sent to boarding school I stopped attending.

My boyfriend got Leukemia and the pressures of growing up made me question if there was a God.

Everybody was doing it all of it for my grandparents and it was extremely hypocritical.

Went to college, began to search for God

church was repetitive and boring-little youth or peer involvement

Probably laziness. Wanting to sleep in. Not wanting to bother.

I started going to the local Methodist church at some point after my mother would not let me be Baptized in a Baptist church.

I was involved in a lot of unchristian sin but it was not considered "rebellious" in my home.

The "Rules" of the Catholic church. And, divorce, later created a "barrier" for me in the Catholic church.

Parents weren't too strict, and followed the culture of the middle east. I was born here and consider myself "Bi-Cultural"

I was working. All of my friends were Catholic. I was Episcopal. I felt different.

The church took money from the family without offering any help to an alcoholic family.

I wasn't enjoying Sunday School. Teacher was boring. My parents would drop me off and go home to read the paper.

I turned my back on God. Being "good" wasn't getting me friends or boyfriends.

I did question it...

Still went to church but I just felt like I couldn't be "perfect" under the watchful eye of my parents.

Didn't see relevance.

I only rebelled against my denomination-Episcopal. I became a Baptist at that time.

Even though I could see the reality of their faith, I thought it was too legalistic and negative.

12 years of Catholic school!

Didn't rebel; always believed. No incentive to continue; no activities or friends at church.

Rebelling against authority.

I wanted to go to church more often.

Confusion is a better word than rebel for me. My parented gave no guidance in religious instruction.

The Pope, abortion, priest scandals.

Didn't like the kids in my age group.

I dating a "non Catholic" girl.

Not sure, didn't publicly rebel however didn't go often. Was bored by/didn't understand what message was being delivered by minister.

Living away from home-"the sixties", the war etc.

Felt as though I didn't fit in.

I lacked Bible knowledge-I was raised strictly in the Rules of Roman Catholicism (Church rules) not Christian Doctrine.
Confirmation stifling, rote memorization with no discussion.
Too restrictive-I wanted to fit in more with the youth around me.
Censorship and Papal infallibility.
Youth minister resigned.
Did a lot of questioning. Almost didn't get confirmed. Spoke at length to assistant pastor. Unable to accept literal interpretations; believe in equality of the sexes.
The church, small, located in slum section.
Got involved with friends who were not involved with church and had other interests.
Not rebelled but became interested in mainstream Prot. Attended a Methodist college.
Did not connect with the people or teaching in a meaningful way.
I blamed God for taking my father away and leaving my mom with 5 kids.
My fathers death. I couldn't understand why God took my father.
Didn't want to attend Catholic school any longer.
I disagreed theologically with the Catholic church. I knew this before confirmation.
Away at college.

Question 13. Was there a time in your college/young adult Years teen years that you rebelled against your religious upbringing? If yes, what was the main reason?

Continued from teen years
I did not seek a church home. Studies, Collegiate sports and working took up most time so I never pursued a church
I wasn't raised with a religion, in college I began to go to church
17-25 Pursuing my own agenda and military life.
I left Roman Catholicism to become a Christian. I attended Baptist church.
None to depart from.
Wanted something different than what my parents wanted.
I didn't want to attend church on a regular basis. I felt I didn't need to.
I came to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
I departed from Roman Catholic religion because I disagree with many of their teachings.
Influenced by the world...
I was introduced to and started reading the Bible and joined a church whose teaching was more in line with the word of God.
I wanted to make my own decisions.
No longer forced to go, began searching for god.
16-30. No longer agreed with all of the beliefs of the Roman Catholic church.
Parents left church, and I felt left out by church peers.
Work and school schedule
It was never reinforced at home so it just sort of faded away.
I married Catholic and began attending Mass.
Sin
Divorce
Being Born again

16 - 35. Life just got busy.
Church had no personal meaning. It was just tradition.
No one in school was involved.
Laziness. Not a priority at the time.
Was not cool. I went down Satan's path. I was truly miserable and lost.
A lack of a personal relationship with God
Wanted freedom. Wanted to explore
Explored other options
Dissatisfaction with the Catholic church. Once I became a born again Christian felt that I could grow in my new faith while attending the Catholic church.
At that time God was not as personal to me as he is now. Also a bit of legalism made me resent God. I found a balance. I also began to take God more seriously but not completely giving up all worldly habits.
No relevance and now not forced to go to church.
Jobs
I thought the church hierarchy was controlling and unreasonable... especially about birth control
Not in spirit but in church attendance.
My Philosophy class discussed religion and though I tried-I couldn't come up with enough answers... So I asked God to reveal himself if he existed. The conflict between my evolution and physics courses made me believe there had to be a God...Awhile later some
The legalisms of my parent's faith.
12 years of Catholic school!
Was married in the Episcopalian church
There was no campus ministry to speak of. Drifted away from religion entirely.
No structured support system/program for post-high school age group.
The Pope, abortion, priest scandals.
My mother died and I was very bitter for many years.
I was in the military for four years and I attended a Congregational church and Young Peoples (adults) Fellowship in Denver. I later drifted away from attending church while being transferred from station to station.
Didn't (never actually) like the Catholic church policies, practices and formalities (i.e. Confession, kneeling, stations of cross etc.)
Turned off by activities of adult males during holy week.
After 12 years in the Catholic schools I decided to do as I wanted.
Away at school.
Freedom to take that choice. Not inspired by message given by minister.
More secular views of life.
I didn't attend church every week-other activities.
Quit going to church. Apathy parents influence was not present.
Probably outside influences; although I always had faith.
Had a child and lived away from family and friends. Husband was often away in the service.
Not really departed - I always went back but tried a Methodist church in college because my boyfriend knew the minister.
No services at sea on ship.
While away at college I no longer attended church on a regular basis.
Pursuit of other interests, church was not high on my priority list.
Attracted to the Baptist church through friendships.
Departed in practice but not belief. No Presbyterian church near in a predominately Catholic community.
To experience the "real" world.

Husband worked on Sundays and we had only one car.
Censorship and Papal infallibility. Age related questioning.
Questioning my beliefs.
Lived in another state-influenced by husband at that time.
Time-working full time and earning degrees full time.
Did not like the preacher.
Away from home at college and not involved with a group or church there. The minister changed and I never developed a good relationship with the new one.
I was doubting some teachings of the Catholic church. I wanted my husband and children to all attend a church we felt reflected our beliefs.
Moved away from home. College-probably thought I would be a good person without church. Exploring alternatives. Rejected patriarchicall framework.
Involved with boyfriends, going out and becoming an adult.
Not interested.
Traveled a lot.
We had compulsory chapel and vespers at school.
School work
I married a man who was raised Catholic although he was a non-believer.
Because of my friends (not their fault) I didn't go to church as often.
Married and left home.
Academics and work responsibilities required me to have commitments on Sundays many times.
Still blaming God...
My fathers death
On my own, worrying about other things, went to church once in a while and major holidays.
Hadn't been to church in some time and didn't return.
Wasn't interested in attending Sunday School or church.
I disagreed with the Catholic church and no adult in my life provided a good role model.
Away at college and not involved
During college my friends were Catholic and I attended mass with them. After college my church friends had moved away and I made new friends at work. When I moved out of my parents home, I looked for a church but never fit in. When I moved to Warwick I
At college a group of us attended a Congregational church-They served coffee and doughnuts to the many college young people in town.

Question 18: In fifteen or fewer words, describe your spouse's religious preference and/or intensity at the time of the marriage.

Not especially active
He did not attend church.
My spouse is a Roman Catholic with a more intense upbringing than I. He had more of a respect, and taught me so, of the traditions of the Catholic church.
He attended church weekly but was not involved in church organizations.
Fairly new Christian (3 yrs), very involved with Navigators and church-pretty intense
My wife was a believer in Christ-Attended an Evangelical church
My husband was raised Catholic. We could not get married in the church because he was divorced however he has always gone to church
Roman Catholic, confirmed, no intensity
My wife is a strong born again Christian woman.
Full time staff with Navigators. Evangelical Christian.
Lapsed Catholic
Very Catholic
He regularly attended church
Personal relationship with Christ, in full time campus ministry (InterVarsity)
My 1st husband was Baptist and attended church, however did not live a Christian life. My 2nd did not attend, but lived with Christian beliefs.
Lapsed Catholic
None, Greek Orthodox
Devout Bible -believing Christian. Attended church regularly.
Very strong Bible-centered
He was a barely practicing Catholic who had 5 months prior, became a believer. Confused.
Mild to moderate belief
Devout Christian (non denominational)
Spouse was Lutheran-not actively practicing.
Was Catholic but wanted to find new religion.
Not practicing Catholic
We were pretty much on the same page. Had been raised as "church goers"-went through the motions-but was never personally real.
Member of Peacedale Congregational Church with weekly attendance and involvement.
Sense of obligation to attend Mass regularly.
Born again Christian totally giving focus of life to the Lord
Fairly strong Catholic Faith-but was agreeable to being married in a non-Catholic church.
My husband was a fairly new Christian. He had been brought up going to church.
He was a believer and had been for about 2 years. He was active in Church and college and career.
He was searching for the truth and attending church with me regularly.
She rarely attended church and questioned God's existence.
x-spouse is Lutheran/Episcopal he does believe in God but does not go to church
In between
Catholic-Lapsed
My spouse was "Greek Catholic" at the time of our marriage, his intensity was average.
He is a Catholic. He is devote and had a similar upbringing.
American Baptist
Committed believer, active participant in church/activities and Bible study.
1st husband - None. 2nd husband met him at Church of Christ and what a great difference when both

participate.
Nondenominational Christian
1st-Baptist, probably a non-believer but we didn't discuss it.
2nd-Episcopalian-Lukewarm believer.
Minimal interest; only Baptized in the Catholic church and no formal upbringing in any denomination.
Catholic-attended mass when young; did not get confirmed, attend as adult, confirmed before marriage.
Non practicing-non believing Roman Italian Catholic
Committed Evangelical Christian (both)
Strong, Christ-centered, Biblical, a leader.
Attended church weekly out of tradition.
He was a Christian and went to church weekly he also attended prayer meetings and was active in the choir and read the bible daily.
My wife was a born again Christian. She regularly attended church and had a personal relationship with Jesus.
He loved God but had no relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. He thought loving God was enough.
Very committed believer: Active in church, good devotional life.
Life long Catholic with a deep faith in God that had not yet been tested.
Presbyterian-Luke warm
Practicing Catholic
1st-Religious, went to church with me-Baptist
2nd-Deeply religious Christian-Episcopal
Roman Catholic, strong connection and denomination but not strong connection to spiritual development.
Raised Roman Catholic but converted to the American Baptist religion after we married. He became a Deacon.
Catholic but not passionate
He was brought up going to church and we still go but he does not speak of religion.
Solid well-rounded believer, having been disciples through the Navigators.
We were both committed Christians and excited about our faith at the time of our marriage.
Catholic
Evangelical Christian and church worker, musician.
None
She was less committed in her walk with Christ but was, at the time a born again Christian.
Committed, energetic... a steadily developing relationship with God.
He attended Presbyterian church on Easter and Christmas.
Had attended Protestant church during childhood and youth. Got away from attendance when older, not involved at marriage.
Husband's family was Episcopalian.
Episcopal-not very interested in formal religion but has a sound faith.
Methodist and attended church and church activities every week. We were married in an Episcopal church.
Her's were the same as mine. We grew up together and attended the same church.
Brought up Catholic. Continued in Episcopal church. Did not go to church regularly.
Born and raised Catholic prior to marriage. Later left the Catholic church.
Jewish and did not believe in all organized religions.
1st-Raised Catholic but not a church goer.
2nd-same as 1st.
I believe at the time his preference was Christian but he was not devote.
1 st spouse: - Lukewarm. 2 nd spouse: - Nonexistent. 3 rd spouse: Nonexistent

Presbyterian-non practicing
Raised strict Catholic. Attended 7 am mass 365 days a year for 13 years.
My spouse was very religious and was very active in the church we went to.
Presbyterian-much stronger affiliation with church and faith.
Methodist and very low in participation.
Nonexistent
My wife was born and raised in the First Presbyterian church by conservative parents. She was active in Sunday School teaching, choir and women's guild.
Episcopalian
Presbyterian-very affiliated with her church. We were married in Presbyterian church with Priest accompaniment.
Presbyterian-devout
Wife was Presbyterian and active in her church.
Brought up Methodist. Was not attending any church regularly.
No Response
1 st - Methodist, little church involvement. 2 nd - Presbyterian, very involved.
1 st - EUB-nominal Christian 2 nd - Presbyterian-active Christian
Roman Catholic with strong faith in God and traditions.
He was brought up in a Presbyterian home-mother was in choir-father was an elder-uncle was an elder. He was always active in the church.
Baptist who wanted to become Catholic.
Presbyterian; somewhat regular church attendance.
Catholic-strong ties.
He attended church infrequently.
Respected my Protestant upbringing. Married in Presbyterian church-attends where I go.
he was a Presbyterian but not particularly active in the church
He was Episcopalian and faithful to his church.
Presbyterian-Did not attend church as often as I because of upbringing and work.
He was raised Episcopalian-intensity was mediocre.
She was born raised and still is Presbyterian.
She was a member of Greenwood attending services occasionally.
My wife was a practicing Congregationalist.
My husband was Greek Orthodox and was brought up just like I was so our beliefs were the same.
Believed but not very dedicated to the church.
Ambivalent about church.
Dedicated believer who sacrificed status for the Christian cause.
Presbyterian, attended regularly and sang in choir.
Devout Methodist
Came from a very religious family.
Wife did not attend church growing up but attended with me off and on for a few years prior to marriage.
Very strong Christian faith. Attended School at Providence Bible Institute and graduated from the evening program. Attended Christian Endeavor at our other Baptist church in her growing up years.
He was a dedicated Baptist who warned he could never become a Roman Catholic.
Attended Baptist regularly.
He had been brought up going to church school. He was Episcopal and attended church fairly often.
Came from a strong Catholic background, he did not practice actively.
She has always been a Presbyterian. At that time she was very involved in church attendance, choir etc.

Baptist so-so in intensity.
Presbyterian. A believer but not an attendee at church.
No religious preference but leaning towards Protestant-no intensity.
Didn't attend church
Medium
Methodist-moderate intensity
Methodist
I believe he was passionate about living a good life, providing help to those in need, but doesn't outwardly express her beliefs.
1st-he was a non church going Catholic.
Methodist
He was involved in the Catholic religion following their rules (family) very strictly.
Unfortunately my spouse was not religious when I met him. Within a few months he was attending worship with me. He was sort of brought up Catholic but didn't go to church.
Practicing Lutheran
Strong
Methodist
Had attended a Baptist church as a child but never was Baptized or Confirmed and did not attend church.
Not a church goer.
Roman Catholic
Brought up Baptist, but not deeply religious.
Husband was raised Methodist, but did not attend.
Presbyterian of strong intensity.
Presbyterian. Very involved.
Raised Catholic, parochial school to 5th grade. Rejected Catholicism but a family man.
Not a clue.
He agrees with going to church and other's beliefs, but does not believe in God.
Raised Catholic. Is a Christian but he is not as passionate about religion as I am.
Would do whatever I wanted-still unenthused Catholic.
He was new to the church family.
Had left Catholic church-was interested in a variety of churches.
He was/is Catholic-I attended church more often than he did.
Methodist-he went to church frequently.
Presbyterian-very intense.
Presbyterian-moderate intensity
Pretty good.
Catholic but not active.
He did not attend church as often as I did.
Not interested-brought up Roman Catholic.
Raised in 3rd generation Baptist church-Grandfather built it.
Not as intense as mine.
Casual interest, minimal initiative in attendance.
My husband was and is a very religious man. He was raised Presbyterian but worshipped with Assemblies of God.
Baptist, not active, wanted to marry in family's church.
Raised Catholic-believes he does not need to attend church. Would occasionally attend, because of an example to the kids, but rarely. Never attended on holidays.

Practicing Presbyterian
Presbyterian
Attended Lutheran church as youth. Not a strong faith at this time.
About the same as mine.
1st-non practicing Catholic
2nd- Converted from Catholic to Presbyterian and attends regularly
Didn't go to church regularly. Brought up attending Greenwood Presbyterian Church.
He was a Roman Catholic
Catholic, attended church weekly.
Baptist, his mother was very involved, but as a couple we did not attend church on a weekly basis.
As indifferent as mine.
Presbyterian with a genuine belief in God.
Presbyterian, occasional attendee of Sunday Service, not devout.
Christian determined to study it later.
He was of the same faith as I was. He had attended Prov. Bible Inst.-after H.S. In 1952 we bought our home in Greenwood, visited several local churches. We became members in 1954.
Baptized, Confirmed but non-practicing Catholic.
Catholic-strong beliefs but did not attend church regularly.
They were both religious

Question19: Please describe your religious preference and/or intensity at the time of the marriage.
Not especially active
We were married in a Catholic church but did not seek a new church home until 4 years after moving
I had just gone through the RCIA program at our church to receive my confirmation before marriage. We went to church weekly and requisite Holy days. At the time of our marriage, our involvement in our religion was very intense.
I attended church weekly but was not involved in church organizations.
New Christian (2.5 yrs), very involved with Navigators-intense
None
Catholic
Baptist, beginning to feel emptiness in life. Reflecting on past religious experiences it's convicting my heart.
I, too, am a strong born again Christian.
Full time staff with Navigators. Evangelical Christian.
Non-Practicing Protestant
No religious preference.
I regularly attended church
New believer for 3 years, seeking to follow Christ.
I have always prayed dearly and attended services.
Fairly regular practicing Catholic
Very much in the world...
Devout Bible -believing Christian. Very involved in church activities/ministries
Very strong Bible-centered
I was a believer who was trying to find and fit Christ into Catholicism

Moderately practicing but strongly believed.
Devout Christian (non denominational)
Roman Catholic-not actively practicing.
I also wanted a new religion/church and to become an active church member.
Not practicing Catholic
We were pretty much on the same page. Had been raised as "church goers"-went through the motions-but was never personally real.
No church affiliation.
Not attending
The same desiring to live for God's glory.
Mildly strong, but had an attachment to my church. I wanted to be married where my parents were married, I was Christened etc.
I was very active in my church and serving Christ.
I was a born again believer and had been for 3 years. I was also active in college and career and church.
I was a Christian but not walking with the Lord.
Rarely attended church but believed in God.
Catholic
Strong
Catholic-Lapsed
I insisted on marrying in the Syrian Orthodox Church and my husband followed my preferences.
I did not go to church every Sunday. I went once a month.
Not affiliated with any church, still trying to understand the purpose of "church".
Committed believer, active participant in church/activities and Bible study.
Non-practicing Catholic
1 st - Lukewarm believer, Presbyterian. 2 nd - A bit more committed spiritually, Presbyterian.
Always been Catholic but not very intensely involved.
Attended Roman Catholic mass just about weekly.
I was now back seeking-lost and wounded. I wanted God desperately and didn't know how to find Him.
Committed Evangelical Christian (both times)
Strong, Christ-centered, Biblical.
Catholic
I was active in our church and read the Bible daily and attended a prayer meeting weekly.
I too was a born again Christian, growing in the faith and serving the church in various ministries.
I knew Jesus but "drank milk" and I didn't think growing in the Lord was important.
Very committed believer: Active in church, good devotional life.
Life long Catholic with a deep faith in God that had not yet been tested.
Presbyterian-Luke warm
I was committed to being married in the church and raising children Catholic.
I was missing my association with the Christian community at the time of my second marriage.
Loved the Lord, strong intensity. Attended Roman Catholic church.
American Baptist
Catholic, very strong
Solid well-rounded believer, having been decuples through the Navigators.
We were both committed Christians and excited about our faith at the time of our marriage.
Protestant
Intense devotion to the advancement of the Kingdom.

Minimal
I was a committed follower of Jesus Christ and was a part of a nondenominational Bible church.
Strong, challenging. At the time I was a staff member/campus minister with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.
I attended Presbyterian church on Easter and Christmas.
Was not attending Protestant church on a regular basis. Still prayed and trusted in Jesus.
I wanted a church wedding. Not able to do so in the Catholic church. Mixed religion had to be a rectory wedding.
Very involved with the Presbyterian faith and with a Presbyterian Nursery school.
Episcopal
Attended and was heavily involved in my church.
Attended church only to sing in choir.
Protestant. I knew that I did not want to be married in the Catholic church.
I still believed but was not as active as before.
Raised Lutheran- 1st-married in Catholic church and signed a paper to raise my children Catholic-I was not religious. 2nd-attended Catholic church every week and children were Baptized and made Communion there.
At the time I would have not considered myself identifying with any religion but I knew I was missing something in my life.
1 st marriage – Lukewarm. 2 nd marriage – Nonexistent. 3 rd marriage - Lukewarm
Roman Catholic-non practicing
Casual but not committed.
I married my 2nd husband because of his spirituality. And I knew that our spirituality would draw us close together.
Indifferent-rarely attend church.
Presbyterian-moderate
Nonexistent
I have never really lost my religious beliefs but after returning to civilian life and marriage, the intensity of my beliefs have greatly improved.
Unhappy with Catholic faith. Stayed with it to please parents.
Presbyterian-devout
Was Catholic but not active.
Attended reformed church occasionally when home during school vacations.
No Response
1 st - Lutheran, meager church involvement. 2 nd - Lutheran, regular involvement.
1 st – EUB - active Christian, 2 nd – Presbyterian - nominal Christian
I was a Baptist with a strong faith in God and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
I attended out of habit not spiritual dedication.
Catholic.
Presbyterian; intensity and involvement grew after we were married.
Presbyterian-strong beliefs, but willing to be flexible.
I usually attended church.
Protestant-mild intensity.
I was still a Baptist at that point, but not attending church on a regular basis.
Methodist and faithful to my church.
Presbyterian-attended church every Sunday and taught Sunday School.
Presbyterian-married in church I grew up in-probably mediocre too. Was more intense in high school/Freshman yr of college and after I had children.

I have always been a Presbyterian.
I was attending Catholic services occasionally.
I was a practicing Catholic.
I was satisfied with my religious beliefs at the time of our marriage.
Believed, regularly attended church.
Not intense. Attended church infrequently.
Believed that we could become an effective "team" for Christ.
Presbyterian, attended regularly and sang in choir.
Baptist of some form of Protestant. Married in Methodist church
Was brought up in the Baptist church, Baptized and married in Baptist church.
Solid Presbyterian attending a few times a month.
Protestant, parental guidance and Christian upbringing resulted in firm convictions of Christianity.
I didn't want a divided religious household and I was attending the Baptist church which I joined 4 months following our marriage.
Baptist
I was brought up to attend church and church school every week (Congregational). When I went off to college I didn't get to worship each week but it was an important part of my life.
Initial beliefs still strong, traditional.
Before marriage I changed to a Presbyterian and at the time of marriage was very involved in church, choir etc.
Baptist attended church regularly.
United Church of Christ. I went but once or twice a month, usually at the Post church.
No religious preference but leaning towards Protestant-no intensity.
Went to church every week but didn't participate in anything except choir.
Medium
Preference for church with modest structure and governance-moderate intensity.
Methodist
less intense at the time of marriage than now.
Wanted to resume and find church. He was and obstacle-worked every other Sunday and small children.
I went to church on my own as much as I could. I tried the Catholic religion but could not accept it.
I felt very strong about my religion and felt strongly about being married in the church and bringing up my children in the church.
Presbyterian
Strong
Methodist
Presbyterian preference but not as intense.
Congregational-Sunday School teacher.
Brought up Baptist (different church from spouse) not deeply religious.
I was leaning towards Protestant ideas.
Presbyterian of strong intensity.
Baptist. Very involved.
Rejected the idea of Christ as only path. Felt all belief in God valuable, all religions OK. Spiritual but not attending church.
Don't remember.
I felt church was important and that God's love was part of our marriage.
Presbyterian. Actively involved with my church.
Protestant-mild intensity.

Interested in attending different Protestant churches.
I was strong enough to stay a Protestant but we did have a small ceremony in the Catholic church.
I went to school away from home. Went to church when I came home.
Christian- very intense.
Presbyterian-moderate intensity
Good
Active Congregationalist
Not too strong as far as attendance. But I always believed and prayed.
Interested in religion but not intense about a certain one
Presbyterian
Strong activity level in the church.
Presbyterian
Had developed a perpetual attachment to a large church near to my residence. Perceived a strong meaningful learning experience by listening to the preacher there.
I believed in Him and knew Him, thanks to the prayers of my husband and many others.
Presbyterian, not active but strong feelings for my church.
Methodist, attended church but not a member.
Episcopalian
I was a Catholic
Baptist but not active.
Very important to me to live a life of faith.
Roman Catholic not really practicing.
1st and 2nd-Strong
Did not attend church regularly.
I was and still am a Presbyterian.
Congregationalist, attended church weekly.
We attended church with his or my family during holidays.
Indifferent, skeptical.
Broadly Christian with little regard for denominationalism.
Congregational-UCC, fairly devout.
Christian vessel.
We rented an apartment- very strange land-lady. We often went to my old home - or to his brothers - he was very attentive to his ailing mother on weekends.
Baptized, Confirmed, sporadic Presbyterian.
Presbyterian-strong beliefs-attended regularly involved in other church activities.
Yes (<i>ed. note</i> – “?”)

Question 20: How would you describe your spouse's religious preference and/or intensity now?

Much higher commitment
My spouse is a believer and has been baptized. He reads the bible and prays but doesn't attend church. I am surprised that he has waned a bit in his responsibilities and involvement in the church. He is highly stressed at work and we have 3 children. It is difficult for us to commit, yet we are regretful.
He lost faith when his father died
Same preference-Intensity more subdued
Walking to the Lord-Very strong and mature Christian.
Very happy with our present church
Very intense passion for the Lord
My wife is a strong born again Christian woman.
Same-Full time staff with Navigators. Evangelical Christian.
Practicing Episcopalian.
Still Catholic and very dedicated.
Has grown since we have had children
Increased in some ways-matured-same intensity
He is Christian, however does not think he "needs" to go to church.
Occasionally goes to church for the sake of the children.
Seeking
Similar
Diminished from earlier years.
We are both involved Christians without a religious label. We prefer Bible based teachings and get involved as much as possible.
Very, very strong.
Devout Christian (non denominational)
Attend church (Lutheran) weekly
Goes to church regularly.
Practicing Christian attends Bible study weekly and church.
We are changed people. Just prior to graduation from college I was born again. Husband took a little while but several years later he had similar "awakening" (I hate to call it an "experience") but the moment when the lights went on and we realized what was missing
More intense since children born.
Attends Baptist Church with me on a regular basis.
A bit Luke warm compared to then.
Probably stronger. We have children attending a Christian school and we are more focused in this area.
My husband is now an Elder and church leader dedicated to serving Christ and others.
He is still a believer.
A committed Christian who thirsts for more of what God wants in his life.
She attends church 3 or 4 times a month and believes in God
Recovering Catholic
He is now more religious than before and attends the Syrian Orthodox Mass at his own will. He is also the VP of the Board of Trustees.
He did not go to church every Sunday. He went once a month.
American Baptist with a desire for more spirituality active church; not necessarily Pentecostal.
Same level of commitment, less active in church activities, more active in study of scripture.
Divorced
Christ is at the center of our lives, we look forward to worship, are involved in the church and are bringing up our kids to be enthusiastic Christians.

Improving! Joins us maybe 1 time a month for church and on holidays.
More spiritual; attend and involved w/ Christian Fellowship services.
A God-fearing, on fire, Born again believing man! Praise God!
Committed to honoring the lord in his life.
Same and growing stronger.
We are very involved
He still reads the Bible daily and we pray with our children and attend church weekly.
My wife is a born again Christian. She regularly attends church and has a personal relationship with Jesus.
Through much trial, he came to love Jesus but he's young I his walk of faith.
Very committed believer: Active in church, good devotional life. Now more mature Godly woman.
Hi faith in God has been strengthened through numerous trials an he is still committed to the Catholic church.
Born again and living for the Lord.
Committed to the church since having children.
He is a deeply religious Christian.
Strong Roman Catholic denomination connection "the true church" and stronger spiritual connection, but still little Biblical knowledge.
He attends church.
Better but not as strong as mine.
Ideal-face to face with Jesus in Heaven.
He has gone through some significant losses and accompanying depression which he describes as a "broken spirit", but is recovering intensity in his faith.
Not active in going to church
Evangelical Christian and church worker, musician.
Very minimal but we go weekly for the children.
A committed and growing Christian woman, 3 steps forward, 2 steps back.
Committed, energetic... a steadily developing relationship with God. Maturing, ministering in a faithful manner.
He attends for the family
More involved and active in the last 20 years. Has shown more personal faith.
We are now Presbyterians.
The same but attends services.
Both very active (Elder, Deacon, etc.) in Presbyterian church.
Attended and was heavily involved in my church.
Both our intensity is stronger, but we are still seeking.
He became a member of the Protestant church and attended services regularly.
More antagonistic.
He is strictly Catholic but doesn't attend any church.
My husband is most definitely Christian and has very strong feelings and beliefs.
No Idea
Presbyterian-sporadic
Burnt out from youth.
My husband is very religious and a very deep thinker. I believe that he feels very close to God too.
Presbyterian-much stronger affiliation with church and faith.
A Presbyterian but low intensity.
Nonexistent

It has never changed
Presbyterian-very affiliated with her church. We were married in Presbyterian church with Priest accompaniment.
Very active in the Presbyterian church and very happy with her church
Presbyterian - greatly involved.
True believer but does not attend church on a regular basis.
My wife is a Presbyterian but still prefers the Roman Catholic traditions; she still has a strong faith in God.
Increases as he read, studies and listens to Christian radio.
Very good.
Stronger intensity than ever, surviving breast cancer brought her faith and religious activity into sharper focus and commitment.
Still catholic-beliefs are still strong though less intense.
We attend church regularly together and contribute.
Agreed with my choices and same intensity as mine strong belief in Bible.
He is very active with the church now and proud of his faith.
He is quietly faithful and attended Greenwood as a child!
stronger now and attends church most Sundays.
It was at an all time high a couple of years ago. Very out of character but he was attending weekly men's Bible studies - has lessened now quite a bit-why I'm not sure.
Still a strong believer.
I believe she has become more devout Presbyterian.
My wife is a practicing Presbyterian who enjoys the fellowship of the church congregation.
The same as mine
Very strong; very dedicated to church.
Growing each and every day.
Intensity is tempered by health but the desire to teach Christ still glows.
Presbyterian, attended regularly and sang in choir. Deacon. Her faith continued to grow each year.
Upon building our first home in Greenwood in 1948 we both joined the local Presbyterian church where we brought up our children.
We are very happy with our church now, Greenwood Presbyterian
She attends a few times a month.
Decreased
We both began attending the Presbyterian church in PA in 1978 and abandoned the Baptist church and he is satisfied it meets his needs.
Attends Presbyterian regularly.
He is an active member and attends every week and enjoys participating in ushering and other activities.
Supportive of me and children, not personally active without prodding.
She has always been a Presbyterian. At that time she was very involved in church attendance, choir etc.
Much more dedicated to church activities.
the same as before; he would have never missed church service except on work days.
Lukewarm Presbyterian.
Died in 2003-only attended church last 6 months. He lived at home because he didn't want me to leave him alone.
Low
Presbyterian-greater intensity as age increases.
She's more intense about her beliefs now that we have a child to raise.
Disillusioned Catholic. Seldom home Sundays to go to church. Supports me and comes with me on occasion.

Has turned against the church and does not go.
I would say he is now Presbyterian although he does not attend services weekly.
Strong
Not affiliated with a church.
Not sure.
Very strong-We attend church regularly together.
Presbyterian of strong intensity.
Presbyterian. Very involved.
Prefers to be churchless-low intensity
Not a clue.
He agrees going to church is good. He attends when our son is doing something special. He allows me to have my own beliefs about God and to bring our son Christian.
He has become more accepting and interested. He especially likes that the kids are involved
Low.
Average to strong.
Regular church goer-probably prefers Congregational organization.
He sometimes attends church with me.
He went to the Methodist church frequently before and now doesn't think too much about church.
Presbyterian-very intense.
Presbyterian-moderate intensity
Happy and attending Presbyterian.
We're divorced-I don't know.
More intense then when first married.
Presbyterian
Casual interest. Perceives no time to attend church.
He is still a very religious man.
Not active at all. But, I think, Believes in God.
He does not need church-it's not for him.
Neither believed in God
We are both practicing Presbyterians who believe that Jesus Christ is our Savior and wish to raise our children in his eyes.
Presbyterian- active as in giving (pledges)
No change---Attended Lutheran church as youth. Not a strong faith at this time.
Presbyterian, strong.
1 st - Do not know; 2 nd - Strong
Does not attend church now.
He is now a Presbyterian.
Same-Catholic, attended church weekly.
?- Divorced
Strong but very private.
Presbyterian with deep faith and convictions.
Slight more intense.
Christian determined to study it later.
Same - Baptized, Confirmed but non-practicing Catholic.
Catholic-much less intense-rarely attends church.
Yes

Question 21: How would you describe your own religious preference and/or intensity now?

I attend church, read daily devotions and try to start each day in prayer.
I take my older two children to church weekly while my husband stays home with the youngest.
I am trying to remain strong so I can impart beliefs on to my children
Same preference-Intensity more subdued
Walking to the Lord-Very strong and mature Christian.
Very happy with our present church
Very intense passion for the Lord
I, too, am a strong born again Christian.
Same-Full time staff with Navigators. Evangelical Christian.
Practicing Episcopalian.
Same if not more
Has grow since we had children
Same or greater intensity, same belief.
I love church.
Twice a month to Catholic church, though troubled by many teachings.
Sold Out for Jesus Christ
Similar-not quite as involved in church activities but still committed to Christ.
Bible-centered
We are both involved Christians without a religious label. We prefer Bible based teachings and get involved as much as possible.
Very, very strong.
Devout Christian (non denominational)
Attend church (Lutheran) weekly
Am a good Christian. Involved in S.S., daily prayer, devotions
Practicing Christian attends church weekly.
We are changed people. Just prior to graduation from college I was born again. Husband took a little while but several years later he had similar "awakening" (I hate to call it an "experience") but the moment when the lights went on and we realized what
More intense since children born.
Want to be in a Church worship service every week even when traveling. Active in Church life and Bible study.
A bit Luke warm compared to then.
Probably stronger. We have children attending a Christian school and we are more focused in in this area.
I am his biggest supporter and prayer warrior. We approach this as one.
I am still a believer and am involved in my church and Bible study.
I've recommitted my life to the Lord and want to live my life for Him.
I may be born again. I attend church 3 or 4 times a month.
I am a Christian and believe in following the Lord.
Strong
Recovering Catholic
I support his effort and feel more religious than before.

I did not go to church every Sunday. I went once a month.
American Baptist with a desire for more spirituality active church; not necessarily Pentecostal.
Same level of commitment, less active in church activities, more active in study of scripture.
Active Christian
Christ is at the center of our lives, we look forward to worship, are involved in the church and are bringing up our kids to be enthusiastic Christians.
Significantly more intense than at any other time in my life.
More spiritual; attend and involved w/ Christian Fellowship services.
A God-fearing, on fire, Born again believing woman! Praise God!
Same and growing stronger.
We are very involved
I read the Bible often, pray, attend church weekly, have began to be more active after the birth of my children try to teach my kids to pray.
I too am a born again Christian, growing in the faith and serving the church in various ministries.
He's my all and all. I am His and He is mine.
I want to be like Jesus and am growing.
My faith in God has grown tremendously. I see many weaknesses in the Catholic church but am committed to reform it not abandon it.
Born again and living for the Lord.
I am committed to my children's religious education.
Deeply religious Christian
Intense connection to God, attending Roman Catholic Church to be joined with husband.. But fell Presbyterian in heart due to theology.
I attend church.
Strong Catholic but disappointed with some of the priests and cover ups by the church.
My faith continues to grow and my roots deepen.
By God's grace, losses & disappointments have strengthened my faith - through fellowship & God's word.
I was raised in a Protestant faith and I don't think I can change religion.
Intense devotion to the advancement of the Kingdom.
Very minimal but we go weekly for the children.
A committed and growing Christian man, 3 steps forward, 2 steps back.
Continuing... persevering through many bumps and scrapes in life and ministry. Some sign of "mid-life crisis" spiritually...doubts, sadness, wisdom - not unlike Solomon (at a much less wise level) in Ecclesiastes.
I attend to understand what my faith is all about ant to provide a religious background for my children.
Been very involved since I was 25; regular attendance, active in church affairs. Strong personal faith.
Very satisfied.
The same. Very involved with the Presbyterian faith and with a Presbyterian Nursery school.
Both very active (Elder, Deacon, etc.) in Presbyterian church.
Steady
Both our intensity is stronger, but we are still seeking.
Became more spiritual than any "Organized Religion".
More intense.
I had a hard time with religion.
I definitely identify myself as Christian and is part of my everyday life.
John 15:5!
Presbyterian - sporadic
Committed but not a missionary.

I feel much closer to God now than I ever have been.
Presbyterian-much more faithful.
A Presbyterian of moderate intensity.
I attend church regularly now.
I have never really lost my religious beliefs but after returning to civilian life and marriage, the intensity of my beliefs have greatly improved.
Much, much, much better than ever before! Don't believe I could be happier!
Presbyterian-very active
Active in the Presbyterian church. Very comfortable at the church.
Presbyterian-well involved.
Active in worship and church attendance/Evangelical.
I am a Presbyterian with a strong faith in God and person relationship with Jesus Christ.
Growing slowly but still I'm a doubting Thomas.
Very good.
Stronger than before but not as intense and full as hers.
Presbyterian-more intense-not at all flexible concerning the Catholic faith.
Bible and inspirational reading and regular attendance and giving are important to me.
Same-Agreed with my choices and same intensity as mine strong belief in Bible.
I have joined the Presbyterian church and my faith is strong-it keeps me grounded.
My faith is deep but not overly apparent.
Stronger now and wanting to learn and know more and attend church most Sundays.
It's easy to get sidetracked with kids activities etc. So it's not intense now-look forward to less hectic schedule and more intense Bible study.
Still a strong believer.
I still continue to only attend church occasionally.
I am a practicing Presbyterian who supports the church but does not attend regularly.
The same.
Very strong; very dedicated to church.
Moderately intense-continuing along the path-intensity increasing.
Hopefully experience has seasoned much misguided zeal, giving a measure of wisdom.
Presbyterian, attended regularly and sang in choir. Elder. My faith continued to grow each year.
Upon building our first home in Greenwood in 1948 we both joined the local Presbyterian church where we brought up our children.
We are very happy with our church now. GPC
I attend a few times a month.
Am a dedicated Christian who displays it's values and faith.
I am totally fulfilled with the p church as well.
Attends Presbyterian regularly.
I attend church regularly and feel that participating in worship helps me prepare better for life each week,
Strong, traditional Protestant but comfortable in the Catholic church.
Still very involved in church. Sing I choir etc.
Much more dedicated to church activities.
I attend regularly-missing a few every few months.
Preference for the Presbyterian church with strong belief
Have been very active for the last 45 yrs. Attend every week and participate in choir, Presbyterian Women, Session, Deacon (previously).
High

Preference for church with modest structure and governance-moderate intensity.
Presbyterian
She's more intense about her beliefs now that we have a child to raise.
I go weekly as much as I can.
I felt very strong about my religion and felt strongly about being married in the church and bringing up my children in the church.
Presbyterian
Strong
Very intense and involved.
My faith is very important to me.
It is my life.
Member of Presbyterian church and have become more religious.
I feel the same. Very strong-We attend church regularly together.
Presbyterian of strong intensity.
Presbyterian. Very involved.
Believe Christ was a great man and set a good example. Believe complex stories help us be in touch with ourselves and spiritual natures. Believe following Christ's example leads to peace, forever. Believe God is my judge and no one else.
Still reading a lot.
Presbyterian. I am a strong believer and enjoy attending church and learning about the Bible. I believe it's fundamental to our lives.
Medium.
Strong belief in prayer and God.
Regular church goer - interested in further study.
I sometimes attend church with him.
Christian - very intense.
Presbyterian - moderate intensity
Good
Happy and attending Presbyterian.
My religion has never been as important to me as it is now.
Very intense
More intense then when first married.
Christian
"Meaningful" interest but at times do not perceive a strong interaction/interest from others in church. Work responsibilities do preclude consistent attendance.
I turn to God for everything.
Presbyterian, attends services but "don't get involved". But am a strong believer and appreciate God and my church.
I have Christ in my heart first. I have faith and trust in the Lord. I believe he is part of every single minute of my life.
I strongly believe and trust in God
We are both practicing Presbyterians who believe that Jesus Christ is our Savior and wish to raise our children in his eyes.
Active
Daily prayer and Bible reading, and religious news have become more important.
Presbyterian, strong.
1 st and 2 nd - Strong
I enjoy attending church now and want to be more involved.

Remain the same -- I was and still am a Presbyterian.
Much more interested in studying the Bible and understanding Christianity.
When I returned home I found great comfort in church. At times I have been disappointed in some of the religious relations I have developed at greenwood. There is not always a great concern for personal situations.
Strong, passionate.
Still have little regard for denominationalism; however my faith is stronger and still developing.
Devout
Christian vessel.
I have health reasons for not attending. I will confess I watch Hour of Power most Sundays.
Same - Baptized, Confirmed, sporadic Presbyterian.
Presbyterian-strong belief just not actively attending church but still involved in women's activities.

Question 23: In fifteen or fewer words, describe how your child's/children's religious preferences compare with your own.

My children have a much deeper understanding than I ever had because of their schooling.
They are the same at this point-they are very young.
They find church uninteresting, but I am trying to get them involved.
Same preference 1-more intense than the other
Our 11 yr old son has accepted Christ and soon to be Baptized. Our 7 yr old son goes not know the Lord. He is being raised as a Christian and goes to church every Sunday.
Age 8-very passionate for age. Age 3 - too young to tell
Both children have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior.
My children's' religious preferences are similar to mine, each with different intensity.
Same and WBCA Religious Ed.
So far same but they are growing
My children are much more spiritual than I was.
Taught about Jesus through scripture since very young; Same religious preferences.
they have been brought up with God and are strong believers.
Too young
Too young
More grounded and rooted at an earlier age.
They are beginning to embrace the faith we taught for themselves.
Our daughter is <1 yr. old
Very strong beliefs.
Too young...
Oldest child attends service weekly-would prefer not to. Younger child is active in church.
She loves to go to church and learn about God.
Same.
They have been raised in a Christian environment and their lives have a base, different than what we had and it shows in their choices, behavior, speech, friends, priorities, etc.
More deeply rooted due to type of upbringing.
They do not attend any church.

My children have a strong faith as a result of home and school education.
Our two oldest sons do not have the commitment to Christ in the degree that our youngest son has. He is very active.
They have all accepted Jesus as Savior but 2 don't really attend church on their own when away from home at college.
My 4 1/2 yr old received Christ when she was 2 1/2 and my 3 yr old son and 10 month old are still trying to verbalize.
We bring our children to church with us. They both believe in God and Jesus as our Savior.
My children and I love God alike!
Same as mine.
Christian
My child is more in touch with God than I was because she has not been forced into her religious environment, instead it came naturally.
They are Catholic. My stepson goes to Catholic School
They need guidance from us.
Similar but different levels of commitments, depending on age.
Loves to hear about God and Jesus, eager to learn.
Hers is the same as mine.
Active Christian
They believe as we do, that our salvation lies in Jesus Christ. They look forward to a bi-weekly Bible study and weekly youth group.
My children are young (3 + 5) so their religious preferences mirror mine.
Consistent with mine, but do not have same early training (i.e. Catholic school)
On fire! These boys are truly seeking their own relationship, not Mommy and Daddy's God. All are Born again.
They're too young.
They are very involved and have great faith as well. They are true believers.
We have them pray before meals, try to pray each morning and night and attend and Sunday School.
They have each asked Jesus into their lives. The oldest has a more intense faith than the others.
#1 loves the Lord. #2 On the fence but believes on Jesus. #3 Tempted by the world but so far is going a steady course.
2 are seeking/finding the Lord.
1 is a prodigal son.
My children are still young enough to have a beautifully simple faith.
Both of our children are born again and living for the Lord.
The know more about the Bible than I.
Their beliefs are stronger and closer to God
None attend church. All profess belief in God.
One in active search for church home the other active in a Unitarian Congregation.
They attend church with us and enjoy it very much.
Same as mine- Strong Catholic but disappointed with some of the priests and cover ups by the church.
They are religious, meaning they speak of the Lord.
My 21 yr old son is a solid believer, descipled by the Navigators, contemplating the mission field. My 15 yr old daughter is a believer but still has a lot of maturing to do.
Our daughter is now discovering the joy and excitement of faith. Our son doesn't express his faith openly.
One got married and became Catholic. The other one remains in the Congregational church.
All still believers in the face of our country's increasing hostility to Christianity
The attend weekly and go to Church school
They are all being taught of Jesus and his relevance and have been given the opportunity to accept him.

Some have and some haven't yet.
Very similar though still forming.
All Protestant and mostly strong in faith. It came to them at different times as they got older. One son is not active but is a believer in Jesus.
Very similar
During their childhood they attended services sporadically because they have doubts and do not always participate. One does, one doesn't and the other two are infants.
The same but not always attending church
Church affiliation is not part of his life.
Does not like to go to church.
Child shares the same as ours.
I'm showing her the Christian side of who she is.
When we found Greenwood we went every week - made their confirmation but now they don't attend church.
Our children have been very involved with a Christian church since a very young age.
Very similar
To be determined
Similar, various stages of committed and/or involved.
My son is more focused and knowledgeable about God.
Very similar-dedicated to having their children have a religious experience
About the same.
Although our youngest son was baptized and raised in the Presbyterian church, he attends his wife's church which is Catholic. Our oldest son no longer attends church.
Daughter-no church affiliation. Son-very active in Episcopalian church.
Son and daughter - minimal.
Both raised Catholic. One married in Catholic church and attends often. One not active in any church.
Not very interested in church but we went as a family since they were born-every week.
Much less involvement.
My daughter is more resistant to going to church although I make sure she goes. When with her father this would not happen if left up to him.
Nominal to active.
My oldest is growing in his faith; his beliefs are comparable to mine. My middle child is ambivalent; she seems to be rebelling against her upbringing.
2 Presbyterian and active. 1 Baptist and active and 1 doesn't attend.
My daughter loves church, she looks forward to Sunday
Neither has much involvement in church life, even though we have both recommended it to them.
My children were all raised Catholic.
Two of the five are active church members-3 believe in God but are now not attending.
Daughter very faithful-goes weekly. Son not interested.
My children are active participants in the youth activities of the church.
My children are not as deeply religious as my husband and I
All still Presbyterian. Oldest does not attend because of job, wife. Middle attends often and youngest rebellious but wanting to know more.
All attend church with me. All are at different stages of religious maturity.
They both attend Sunday School and my oldest likes PYF.
Very similar
One child participates in Roman Catholic services. Our other child only attends church with us, if ever.

Sadly my oldest son has no religious beliefs, my second son believes but does not attend church. My youngest believes and attends church when he can with his wife.
Very strong for their age.
Christ and the church plays a large part of my children's lives.
They learned more of Christ and the Bible at an early age (than I). All are believers.
Same as 3 plus one Baptist.
1 Jewish (convert by marriage), 1 Mormon, 1 Presbyterian.
Same as his parents and his own family.
Not as dedicated although Christian values and upbringing are reflected in their lifestyles-Son attends worship regularly-One son became a Roman Catholic at my urging to unite their family-since divorce not involved in any church life. Daughter is a devo
They are both very good, kind and loving but are not active in any church currently.
Not a member of any church. But lean toward Baptist.
Not fully mature, but mostly in line with mine.
They are both Presbyterians and are involved in church activities.
Not sure. I think Presbyterian but they are both faithful believers who read the Bible regularly but do not attend church.
They are lukewarm
1 daughter very active, 1 daughter attends only occasionally, son lives out of state-wife Roman Catholic-attends with his family occasionally.
Very low I guess.
2 - very similar and 1 convert to Roman Catholic
Very little.
Our child is too young to compare
2 children go occasionally. 1 goes with husband to another church with children but still Protestant at heart.
2 of the 3 attend are involved weekly and Sunday on a very regular schedule. 3rd does not go at all.
About the same.
Very similar
3 - Presbyterian 1 - Lutheran 1 - Catholic (for marriage)
Both were Baptized and Confirmed in this church. One more involved than the other. Not as intense as my involvement.
My children do not attend church regularly.
Theirs was good. As adults not as good.
They have spiritual beliefs, but do not attend church.
Not as strong.
2 are Presbyterian and very active. One is Episcopalian and very active.
Son spiritual and I hope he "returned" to church when older. Work on Sundays prevented attendance. Daughter bored with church (15 yrs. Old) -very selfish not spiritual/emotional.
My son enjoys attending church and Sunday School.
My oldest (7) enjoys Sunday School very much. I believe it impacts her choices, even at a young age.
one more, one less.
Very weak.
1 Lutheran, 1 Methodist, 1 Catholic
Our son went to CCD until 6th grade and our daughter went to Sunday School until 6th grade also. He practices, she doesn't.
They went to the Presbyterian church to Sunday School and were Confirmed.
Same religious preferences but appear to me to be intensely religious.

About the same. They became deacons. I am proud.
All enjoy Sunday School and find it important.
One out of three.
I think it's even stronger than mine.
Daughter-the same. One son average the other disinterested.
Both married in Roman Catholic church-neither attend church often.
Sincere interest in spirituality but not consistent in attendance.
My children see how we turn to God for everything good and bad. Two of the three children also follow this.
My oldest and youngest have the same as me. My middle son believes in God but just questions that Jesus is the son of God-he is very spiritual.
Oldest believes but doesn't practice. Youngest believes and practices.
We have a 4 yr. old and a 1 yr. old, so they currently accompany us to church.
Give to church-but attends not active
One attends church with her family regularly; one doesn't-just less than once a month.
1 strong, 2 weak.
Mine-weak step son-strong
I think too young to tell now. Likes going to Sunday School.
They're both Presbyterian and better stay that way.
Very similar.
My daughter enjoys Sunday School and church when she is there but does not always like to make the effort.--So, the same as me!
Same as ours. They are young (8 and 12).
Daughter is Roman Catholic and very faithful and raises her kids that way. Son is not at all interested.
Developing faith, medium level of discipline with religious duties, as than my intensity (but more than me at that age!).
Same but they are so much more accomplished.
My son attended Sunday School and youth group when he was young.
Only went to Sunday School
Older daughter-non churched, liberal orientation. Younger daughter- aligned toward fundamentalism.
Daughter-same as me. Son-does not attend

Question 24: If you became inactive in church life at some point in your life, what was the main reason ?

I did not get a sense of community at church. It was not an exiting place to be.

I was never active to begin with. I became active with my husband.

Busy with school and work.

Ages 24-37. I was not very happy with the church I attended. I didn't feel any sense of community. I felt like I was going through the motions.

Pursuing self interest

16-45. Lack of faith, no tangible benefit for the time invested

Dissolution with institutionalized religion-instead discovered personal spirituality,

Didn't feel like I needed religion in my life.

I was living in the world...

Boring and hypocritical

No longer forced to go.

Did not agree with church teachings and did not care for repetitive services.

My parents.

Work and school

Laziness, disinterest, not feeling it was effectual in my life.

I was no longer told by my parents that I had to go.

Thought I didn't have time because of college class work.

I left college and started working. I traveled and worked a lot. I was socializing with people who were not active in church.

School, jobs, work, etc.

Illness

My husband was not used to going to church every Sunday. Even though he would go if I asked, I felt like I was pushing the family with little support.

College - became too busy.

I was working on Sundays for 4 years.

I move to attend graduate school, did not find a new local church-for a brief time (many years ago).

Busy with life.

No guiding influence. Didn't have the core commitment to continue pursuing my faith without someone leading me.

Laziness. Not a priority at that time.

Had newborn twins; did not feel a connection with Roman Catholic church, Pastor and parishioners.

I hated church. It's politics-it's hypocrisy. I rebelled against my earthly father.

Not saved - no desire

I was divorced and did not feel comfortable in the Baptist church.

Conflict in mind over church leadership and difficulty handling 3 children 1-4 yrs alone with no help in church

Not in spirit but in church attendance.

12 years of Catholic school! And the hypocrisy of the Roman Catholic church.

The church was not close enough.

Didn't rebel; always believed. No incentive to continue; no activities or friends at church.

Could not attend every week for a while because of husband's work.
80's during sports. Too much hockey, too little church.
Did not feel the need for church. Got too busy.
We were both of different religions and could not find a church which would welcome us.
I moved away.
I had no guidance and it was very confusing
My parents came from different Christian backgrounds and seemed to agree to do nothing in terms of guidance for my sisters and I.
Apathy
My boys traveled with a hockey team almost 3 weekends a month.
Don't know
I did not like the church service where my family attended.
Not sure: Maybe loss of faith. Maybe just young and foolish.
Military service
Not happy with the Catholic church.
Lost interest. Busy at school.
The death of one of our children. We both became somewhat disenchanted.
Felt disconnected, uncomfortable as I knew no one at churches I attended.
Was not inspired/did not feel a part of the church.
Developed a secular world view.
Apathy - I enjoyed worship when I went - but found no fellowship.
Immaturity
We moved a lot - My dad was in the Navy.
Had a child and lived away from family and friends. Husband was often away in the service.
After I got married and moved to RI-until I had children-I didn't attend because 1.-I didn't know where to go (not many Presbyterian churches) and 2. Sunday was our only day off and we used it to fix up an old house that we bought.
I was in the Navy on small ships with no church services offered.
I stopped attending church on a regular basis when Sunday School was moved to an earlier time.
My wife and I were searching for a common church.
Moved a considerable distance away from Greenwood.
Working hours prevented time to attend.
Sunday work schedule-5am to 3pm for 12 yrs.
I had been assigned my first army Post after training and did not care for the tone of the Post church-No vehicle thus no church.
Disinterest, took too much time from my active weekends.
New baby, husband in military, crazy schedule, lived overseas.
Family members do not cooperate and resent going to church-especially to get up Sunday morning in time.
Age of questioning and exploration of alternatives.
While with husband #1 in CT.
Did not like preacher
Away from home at college and not involved with a group or church there. The minister changed and I never developed a good relationship with the new one.
Moved and didn't feel the need.
Not interested.
Traveled a lot.
Health

Active duty in the military and graduate school.
I married a man who was raised Catholic although he was a non-believer.
Moved to NYC for school and worked
Academics and work responsibilities required me to have commitments on Sundays many times.
Disillusioned, hurt and angry at God for the loss of my father and brother.
Too self absorbed-college-early 20's
13 to 40. I really didn't know about God. God was never explained to me for what he is.
Out of site out mine
No interest.
Lost interest
Didn't feel it was necessary. At the time wanted to be with my friends more.
After 5 minutes into the sermon I was lost. The minister at the time spoke to deeply in theory, and at that age it just seemed to confuse me.
Wasn't interested in attending Sunday School or church.
Secular commitments-in high school -sports as a young adult I worked on Sundays as a waitress.
Indifference. Conflicts with the Catholic theology.
Not motivated.
Various times for various reasons. Working too much, too much school, Army Reserves
Health reasons
Moved out of state, post-college job required >50% travel. Also disillusioned of "Formal" church. Several bouts with clinical depression etc. Tough few years.
Moved away from church-lost interest
Presbyterian church on campus focused on social issues almost exclusively.

If no longer inactive, what was the main reason you became active again?

Birth of Children
Started a new life with my husband
Knowing that Christ was the only way-Committed to him at 41
I think it is very important for my son to be raised knowing God and I am very happy with my new church.
We came back to the Lord after my daughter (8) was born. Wife Baptized when daughter was 2
Became a follower of Christ
Children
It was time.
I felt like I was missing something in my life.
My children
I found Christ!
Found God
Birth of children
The realization that God/Christ is real and desires to be part of our lives, has a plan.
Having children
Was seeking and came to faith in Christ.
I got married and had children. We thought church and Sunday School would be important in their development. We also need to be positive role models.
Family

Love or Christ and I want to bring up my family correctly.
Moved again to an area where I was in a local church
I wanted my child to attend Sunday School.
Became aware of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
We wanted to get married in a Presbyterian Church, so had to attend classes. Then started going every week and God has continued to pull us closer through the years.
Having children and feeling so very responsible for their upbringing; also due to some losses in my life and general hard times,
Started to attend new services with friends; children very involved.
I returned to the Episcopal church where I was welcomed with open arms.
I need God in my life. Church helps me to be closer.
Maturity and a less "busy" lifestyle
Family, children
Missed learning and hearing of God's word. Felt something missing.
We are active and have been for a number of years.
Need for the comfort of organized church.
Life changing events that confirmed my belief in God.
Found a church I was comfortable in and had many activities involving children.
We had been looking for a church and then my husband and I experienced a traumatic event and that pushed us to make a decision.
Could no longer ignore his claim on my life.
Needed something to believe in.
I needed to have a religious life and experience in God's worship.
Began to read the Bible, regained my faith, joined wife's church at Greenwood.
Spouse
Introduce my child to Christianity.
I felt I was missing a very important part of my life.
Marriage, children, return to home church.
The passing of years and the need to believe that there was a higher being who had a plan and was in control.
God "spoke" to me and turned my life around. My life was going downhill and this turned around.
Apathy-I wasn't satisfied with my life.
No Response
I enjoy attending church as often as I can.
Moved back to Warwick and wanted to bring our children up in the church.
Having children and wanting them to experience a "Sunday routine" as I did growing up in hopes of becoming closer to Christ.
Opportunity to attend.
Finding a new church and enjoying the friendliness.
Had opportunity to attend worship on Sundays again.
I became active when I found a "church home" and every move strove to find a "church home".
Having children and wanting them to grow with a Christian foundation.
Resolution of questioning.
I enjoy church.
Children were born and I wanted them to be involved in Sunday School and church.
Children
Singing in the choir.

Had become pregnant and getting ready to raise children.
We finally found a church home away from home.
Enjoy going to church and got married.
Became active when married.
Strong desire to attend and hear the word of god and reassurance.
My children-wanted them raised as Christians.
Greenwood Church - Your sermons spoke to me.
Looking to know higher power.
Had children and wanted them to have a religion.
Had children
So that my child would have religious education and attend Sunday School.
A personal crisis. My mother was murdered in a school violence incident and I needed answers.
Realization that life's answers couldn't be found in books, activities or other people-but in a relationship with God.
I love church. I can afford to be in church on Sunday with my children and my husband.

Question 29: If church involvement has increased/decreased, describe in fifteen or fewer words what you think caused the changes.

Desire to attend to learn and set a better example for our child, and enjoyment of attending
The positive feeling that comes when you grow closer to God helps you want to know and learn more.
Even at 36, I am always questioning. However, my oldest child is at a Christian school and is learning many things that I did not know! I feel that it is important to impart these values that come from a faithful life onto my children
My children need to be educated and involved
Coming to Christ
Finding a Church I was happy with and even West Bay Christian Academy has made me see the importance of God in our family life.
A genuine walk with the Lord and surrender to his will for our family
Keener awareness of God's plan in my life has led me to be more accepting of God's will for my life.
Children and a renewed desire to contribute to a religious community and to learn from a religious community.
Realizing a change in priorities towards the spiritual
The times we live in and having children of my own.
My maturity and questioning authority.
My children... And a desire to know Jesus on a much more deeper level. Not a Religion!
Finding the heart of God and a church that allows us to express it.
The Holy Spirit is prompting.
Found God at age 20 through Intervarsity Christian Fellowship in college.
Became involved with music ministry.
I always wanted to go to church but I didn't want to go alone.
Having children and having cancer
God is alive in our lives. I want to know what he has to say in different matters. I need to know him better. Unfortunately the pressures of constraints of life and time are currently making it difficult to be involved in many Bible studies, etc. I want to
With friends and peers dying at early ages, it causes one to think more seriously about my mortality and

how we should live our lives before our time is up.
God's word and his spirit drawing me.
Having children who are learning about religion.
The need of the congregation was probably one of the biggest reasons. There was/is a place for those who are willing to serve and answer to that call.
Seeing God at work in the lives of people in my church
I've studied the Bible more and saw how He wrote history.
No man could effect history so much as Jesus did if he were not the son of God.
I truly love reading the Bible, as it is my road to staying on the right path. Also, my dad passed away 4 years ago and I searched for more closeness to God. I also believe my children need God.
Open mind
Marriage, my daughter and how I was touched by God in miraculous ways.
My husband was not used to going to church every Sunday. Even though he would go if I asked, I felt like I was pushing the family with little support. Same as above
Life changing experiences.
I was taking daughter to Sunday School. I found the church we decided to attend warm and friendly. We now have a great church family.
Growing relationship with a personal savior.
Have been drawn into (pushed?) a strong faith community.
Wanting to give my children a solid, religious upbringing also making sense of loss and difficult times also have become less egocentric as I have gotten older.
Although interest waned for a bit, change in churches, and involvement of family and friends has caused more awareness and participation.
The Holy Spirit. I dedicated my heart to Christ 5 years ago and I've never been the same since.
A need to grow in the Lord. A desire to know and serve him better.
Through my relationship with Jesus Christ I have decided to know Him better and seek to be used where He would have me in His kingdom.
Increased study of Bible and change of church.
I began to intensely study the Bible about 12 years ago and I began to grow in worship and prayer and appreciate the cross of Christ more than ever
Christ in me!
The Holy Spirit has guided me to seek the lord with greater focus.
As we grow in Christ we learn more what the Lord expected of us after we are saved.
My commitment to our children being raised Catholic.
Interest the same; activity is less since I moved further from my Presbyterian church 5 years ago. Also, I do not have the energy to travel 30-50 minutes to church.
Life changes have increased my interest in what God has planned for me.
I realized how much I don't understand of God's word; and I wish to be active in helping others.
I was active in the women's groups and I enjoyed it.
Have not found a church we fit in or that it suits our needs.
Realizing that my purpose in life is to give away my life by serving others. Seeing Christ in everyone and knowing we are all part of a larger plan.
I started reading the Bible again and attending Sunday School.
I found a church that felt close and family oriented. I helped with PYF, Sunday School and many functions,
Maturity
An increasing awareness of my blessings and his mercies.
Getting married and having kids.
Death of father.

The people and the pastor at my church have made all the difference in the world.
Marriage and awareness of God's blessings in my life.
Age makes one wiser!
My involvement has increased. I enjoy serving in the congregation at Greenwood.
Not sure: Maybe getting older and wiser.
The exposure to those who are sincerely religious and practice their beliefs.
I became part of an active church.
It was gradual increased involvement.
Need for spiritual life.
Age, life experiences have caused me to rethink my position.
Actually relying on God for help, support, and blessing; reading more religious materials and the Bible.
A desire/calling to be more involved in ministry.
Retirement allowed me more time to be active.
The spiritual life of my family. It is vital that my child grow up knowing God and that our family grow in our Christian walk.
Importance of a stronger faith; try to live and respond as God expects; learn more about His teachings and behave accordingly.
More focus on values-what really matters-and a desire to reduce conflict in my life.
Certain health issues within our family and the need to know God is always there to guide, comfort and receive thanks for the many blessings enjoyed and prayers heard.
Recognition of how real, true and involved God is with my life.
New leadership in the church.
I realize how important faith is and that prayer is very powerful.
More time to involve in doing other activities in the church in addition to regular Sunday services.
Having children-seeing parents and acquaintances die.
Not away from home and able to attend.
Less free time.
The pace of life, educational demands, spending weekends out of town.
Jesus keeps redirecting my life in such a way that I feel my faith intensifying
The spiritual growth of my children initiated my own spiritual growth
Living observantly intensifies the truths you learned earlier; death seems distant when one is young.
Increased due to gradual increase in my spiritual walk with the Lord. More complete understanding, as I grew older of what Jesus did for me on the cross, of salvation, and of being a good steward
Age – loss - Diminishing skills
Had been active in the choir and bell choir formerly. Age got in the way.
Age has entered into active participation in church offices.
Family, meaning of life.
Becoming older.
Getting older, events in my life and family caused a more intense involvement and a feeling that the morality of our country needs help and I'd like in some small way to help improve the moral and spiritual situation.
Needed to grow in my Christian life.
More time (after children) and maturing.
I became closer to God.
Involvement in church affairs and attending Bible study.
As an "older adult" searching for truth has become more important.
Have become more involved.
Church programs. Bible studies.

Maturity. More time as children get older. Less weekend work required.
Involvement.
Having children certainly had an impact in the increase in my involvement. It's so important to them (and me).
Children
Since no longer working or raising children, I have had more time for religious inquiry and study.
Don't really know-perhaps making more time and wanting to study more.
Age
My strong belief is that God is the ruler of our lives and has lead me through many difficult times with strength and honor.
My children, my divorce all these things the Lord helped me with to get me back to being close to Him.
Probably have more time to myself.
Interest is affected by realities of multiple demands to maintain work/home life and also maintaining own health in the physical economic sense.
Crises in my life-finally really realized I had to turn my life over to God-totally.
Your sermons and personal Bible studies.
Because I have children that I want to raise in the church.
Becoming head usher @ first service (8:00) also active on session and committees off and on for 20 years.
The influence of friends, and that I should give something of myself.
A more caring attitude of fellowship and helping others, and learning more of the Bible.
You/I realized it takes a lot to "run" a church and wanted to be a part of it.
had children and wanted to give them a foundation and now that I have started attending I'm really enjoying myself.
The death of my dad.
Religious education; the more I learn, the more I want to learn.
Moving back home my mother was very involved in church and liked to do things with me that involved her work with the church.
The truth. Good news can't be side-lined.
The desire for a stronger relationship with God.

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